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THE McVEYS

(AN EPISODE)

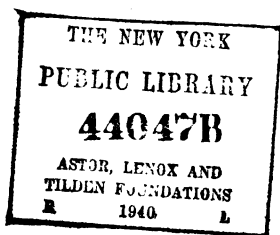
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✓
JOSEPH KIRKLAND, 1830-1894.

AUTHOR OF "ZURY: THE MEANEST MAN IN SPRING COUNTY"



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
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1888



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THE McVEYS.

INTRODUCTORY.

ZURY PROUDER was a great boy in "the thirties," who grew, in "the forties," to be the "meanest man in Spring County" through the pinching agency of frontier toils and pains and resulting avarice. His sacrifices were rewarded with large prosperity. Our present story opens at the time when his success and his meanness were at their height, and goes on until (under influences, some as sweet as honey and some as bitter as gall) he became regenerate, and possessed of a heart and soul fairly typical of the great and generous West in its ideal development.

Anne Sparrow was a bright New England girl, who taught a primitive district school near the Proudler farm, in early days, when she and Zury were great friends. Then she married and moved to Springville; and now (in "the forties") she is the Widow McVey, maintaining her two children in modest comfort by her services as book-keeper in a wholesale store in that flourishing young city

The story of the McVeys must deal with humble life in a prairie town ; as that of Zury did with still humbler life in a purely farming locality.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY DAYS IN SPRINGVILLE.

SPRINGVILLE, being in the fertile, open prairie, "flat as a floor," was dreadfully ugly through a bald and struggling infancy; but with time had come taste and trees; and at the opening of our story (some forty years ago), it had got into its teens, and, seen under its best conditions (sky bright and soil dry), it looked like what it was: the home of industry, prosperity, piety, and contentment. Each dwelling stood by itself, with whitewashed pickets before it, and a solid board fence on either side, a lilac bush, thorn-apple, or cherry-tree in the dooryard, and climbing roses about the porch; and so an atmosphere of home, pervaded by the scent of flowers and the sound of children, breathed over broad acres where before had been only prairie-grass, prairie-flowers, and prairie-chickens.

The streets had been laid out through corn-hills, traces whereof were still visible in the newer portions where sidewalks and gutters had not been laid. In such places, when the frost was coming out of the ground, the whole road, from fence to fence, was often a sea of mud, sometimes impassable to horses. The cows, whose

cloven hoofs spread out in the ooze, could wade painfully through, while the little boys driving them home clambered along astride the fences on either side.

Since the time when our present story opens, Springville has grown to be a handsome, thriving city, with pavements and electric lights; with literary societies and polite people, the families of soldiers from the great war, and statesmen from the great peace. But then it was in the other stage; a hamlet struggling upward with the ugliness of prairie mud, and the ugliness of an incomplete town: —

“Not a man, not a boy;
Just a hobbledehoy:”

Voice changing from childish treble to manly bass — second teeth crowding out first teeth one by one.

The churches were, of course, the most costly buildings in town, and their white spires shone far above the humble wooden houses and the growing, but ungrown, elms and maples. The least presentable part of the young city was the place where it made most pretension. In the “business centre” one might see an occasional tall, narrow, straight-sided brick structure, built with party-walls which were at some future day to be shared with other buildings like itself, joined to which it would form a solid block. In the mean time these isolated monstrosities were elbowed by mere shanties: perhaps a squalid little paint-shop, smeared with experimental daubs of all colors;

or a blacksmith shop, musical with hammer and anvil, and redolent with the ammoniacal aroma of burnt hoof (dear to boys); or a coffin-shop, with its dreary, dark-stained products set up outside to dry in the sunshine; or — a printing-office. Literature — even literature the humble slavey of the nations — never found a shabbier abiding-place than the office of the “Springville Bugle.” Honor and fame were in its gift, but obloquy was its own portion, so far as outward show went. Its sign had once shown, “Springville Bugle,” in legible characters, but idle loungers, armed with rusty nails, had reduced those sounding dissyllables to “vil e Bug,” and as no second painter had offered to do work in pay for an “ad” or a “sub,” there the ignominious monosyllables had endured until even they had become almost illegible.

The doorway, with its whittled and weather-beaten frame, was more squalid than the sign; the hall, with its ragged plastering, was more squalid than the doorway; the stairs, worn to splinters by shuffling footsteps and sliding iron chases, were more squalid than the hall; but the climax of grime, wear-and-tear, disorder, dust, and confusion was the office itself. The editorial desk was a small, cheap, pine structure, whereof the back was arranged with pigeon-holes, and the front let down for a writing-table; but this was always so full of trash that it could neither be closed nor written upon; so all the “original matter” was composed by the editor-proprietor-

publisher-type-setter-in-chief, standing in front of his case, composing-stick in hand, and brain and fingers working in unison.

Philip and Margaret (twins) were the only children of the widow Anne (Sparrow) McVey. To work for their living was so much a matter of course that they were not even proud of it. Poor and prosperous, laughing and laughter-loving, sensitive yet unhurt, their lives were whole-souled and healthy like those of their neighbors. There were three heads and six hands and six feet to carry on the simple business of that household, though the mother was still its bread-winner; she being book-keeper in the only wholesale house in Springville.

Everybody knew by instinct that Anne McVey, at some time of her life, must have been an ornament of a more metropolitan city than Springville could then pretend to be. Everybody knew this and forgave it, so Springville must have had excellent and estimable citizens, even then.

Little Phil was what is called a "natural mechanic." He gloried in blacksmith-shops and wagon-factories and turning-lathes and all such things. Each as it dawned upon his perception filled his soul with delight. His life had been, like other boys' lives, a succession of "crazes" for one pursuit after another; but his absorbing passions had been for things material and mechanical rather than for the mere common sports of childhood.

Naturally, in his interest in machinery, the Engine that moves the World was not left out. The first outward evidence of this interest was the presence on his clothes of stains of printing ink, ineradicable in the weekly wash, and productive of vigorous protests from the domestic washers.

"Why, Mother, they let me help turn the handle of the press all the while the whole edition was being worked off!"

"Very well, my son. Next time it happens I'll let you turn the handle of the wash-tub all the while the whole edition of ink on your clothes is being worked off. So make ready!"

"Oh, Mother, I tell *you* the jour is a smart man!" (The journeyman was an educated person who had exchanged a good position for a tramp's life; counting the world well lost when whiskey was the price.)

"What is his name?"

"Hall is his real name; but they call him Alky, because he drinks — Alky Hall; alcohol, you know. But he's given up drinking now, since I told him about temperance and lent him my Sargent's 'Temperance Tales.' I'll warrant you he'll never drink another drop."

"How is he smart?"

"Oh, he knows everything! And then he's such a witty man! Why, let me tell you: To-day I asked him what time it was by his watch, because he always carries a watch; and he said it

was too cloudy to tell time by his watch because it was a sunshine watch; and I asked him why he called it a sunshine watch; was it because it only went when the weather was fine. And he said it never went at all, weather or no, except sometimes to his uncle's, and that was the cloudiest kind of weather; that he called it a sunshine watch because when the sun shines he can pull out his watch and look up at the sky and guess what time it is as well as anybody else."

Nobody laughed; and so the hero-worshipping little chap made another effort.

"And oh, you ought to hear him whistle once!"

"I guess he can't whistle better than my mamma!"

"Oh, come now, Meg! Can mamma whistle smiling? Like this:—ecee-eeceee-ecee-eeceee—with his lips wide open and smiling! A real tune, too!"

This was unanswerable, and the jour, being so witty and being able to whistle smiling, was conceded to be grand, gloomy, and peculiar, to sit upon his throne a sceptred hermit, wrapped in the solitude of his own originality.

The young enthusiast managed to interest his mother and sister enough to induce them to visit the printing-office at noon-spell, when it was deserted by its other occupants. Anne (to whom printing-offices were not an absolute novelty) was impatient to get away from the dirt and squalor, but Meg was interested in everything. The press

looked *like* Benjamin Franklin. The fresh, damp, printed sheets smelled sweet and literary. She even had cloudy perceptions of the ringing voice and the awful power that lie hidden in those tiny strips of black type-metal. The impression filled her soul for whole days and nights, and through all her life never became entirely obliterated.

The following week found Phil perched upon a high stool, his bare, brown feet (with two stubbed toes wrapped in rags, two being his usual average) clinging to the highest rounds to make him tall enough to reach the "upper case," and his grimy little fingers laboriously picking out the types to form a paragraph which was really to "come out" in the next "Bugle," and illumine the globe! But, oh dear! How could *anybody*, no matter if he was the oldest man in the world, remember all the boxes, especially those little ones in the upper case?

"Say, Shorty," cried the jour to the proprietor, "got anythin' that 'll make about another stickful for the editorial?"

"No, Alky; dunno 's I have. Fill up with dead ads — or suth'n local."

"Well — lessee — yes, I did pick up a yarn last night that 'll do."

He stepped to his case and rapidly "slung in" the following paragraph: —

"A circumstance transpired in our midst last week that shows up the caliber of some of the affluent capitalists of our county who never take the BUGLE. One of them, hailing from near

the enterprising city of Wayback, called with his wife at the dry goods emporium of two of our Merchant Princes (Pink and Purple, whose display ad may be found on the first page of this issue of the BUGLE), and after the good lady had sampled the stock she paused before a pile of fans that laid near the door. The affluent citizen remarked to his better half, 'Come along, old woman. We don't want none of them, I reckon.' 'But,' says she, 'they give these away — don't charge nothing.' To which her generous husband replied, 'Oh, well, then — take a couple.' *This is reliable.*"

Next morning the cottage dwellers were delighted with Phil's paragraph when the "Bugle" arrived. His mother cut it out for her omnivorous scrap-book. But why did she also cut out the pleasing tale concerning the rich citizen?

There they stand to this day: Phil's first effort, his paragraph as remodeled, and the additional trait in the character of Zury Prouder.

"But, Mother; why did you cut out the fan story, too?"

"Why — don't you think it is a good story?"

"No, not very. Why did you want to keep it? Because it spoke of Wayback?"

"Don't be so inquisitive, my son."

"Well, I won't if you will just — tell me."

"That would only encourage your inquisitiveness."

"Do you know who the man and woman were?"

"How could I, when their name is not given?"

"I believe you do know and won't tell me! What makes you look so funny? What are you laughing at and trying to hide it?"

"I am laughing at your curiosity; and now I request that you will drop the subject and talk of something else."

"Well, but, Mother" —

"Philip, my son! Do you hear me? I will not have you so inquisitive!"

Phil appeared to give up his quest and went on reading the "Bugle;" spreading it out flat on the floor, lying on his stomach, planting his elbows in the middle of the page, holding his head up by two hands clutched in his curly locks, and kicking his bare and restless heels high above his back.

CHAPTER II.

PHIL'S DISCOVERIES.

THAT same evening, after another visit to the printing-office, Phil returned to the charge.

"That was Zury Prouder and his wife that took the fans."

Meg looked anxiously at her mother and broke forth : —

"There now, Phil, you stop ! Never mind him, Mother !"

"I must mind it when my son persistently does what he knows gives me pain."

"How gives you pain ?" asked the irrepres-
sible.

"It reminds me of the time when I was in dreadful trouble, just before I was married."

"Were you sick ?"

"Yes, indeed ! I came very near dying."

"Who took care of you ? Father ?"

"Yes, partly."

"Did Zury Prouder have anything to do with it ?"

"Oh, a great many people did what they could."

"Then I should think you would like Zury Prouder, and be friends with him, and have him

come to see us." He paused for explanations, but getting none, went on: "Instead of that, everybody seems to know him except us!"

"Have you been asking questions around, my son, about Wayback and all those things I begged you never to speak of?"

"Why — only jest a leetle teenty-taunty bit!"

"What did people say?"

"Why, they said they s'posed you knew Prouder 'cause you come from Wayback, where he lives; and Polander Brothers is where you keep the books and where he buys a great deal of truck — and so on."

"Anything else?"

"Oh, yes; they say he is the meanest man in Spring County, and the richest."

"Nothing else about me?"

"No, of course not. What should they?"

"Well, I'm glad of it! I don't want us or our affairs to be talked about. And the worst of all would be if my own children were to go gossiping around about their own mother!"

"But, Mamma," said Meg, "other children know about their fathers and mothers and grandfathers and grandmothers and uncles and aunts and cousins."

"Well, my children, suppose I tell you about yours, will you leave me in peace hereafter?"

"Yes, Mother. Tell me how you come to be so — different-like."

"Well, then: I was born in Massachusetts, and worked in a cotton-factory. I cannot remember

my father, but I do remember my mother. She was an educated woman, and taught me, and that is the way I became what you call 'different.' "

" Did she work too ? "

" No ; she edited a little paper there was there and I helped her do it. Then she grew sick and I worked on for both of us. And then she — died " — A shuddering sigh here made a break in the widow's talk. " Then I — made other friends — but we fell out, and I came West and taught school at Wayback. "

" Did you know Mr. Prouder ? "

" Don't interrupt, my son. I lived in a room in the school-house ; and knew everybody there, and for a while I was very happy. My scholars love me yet, I hear. " A bright smile lighted up her face at this thought.

" Who tells you about them ? "

" Oh, I hear in various ways. Well — then I got very sick. "

" What was the matter with you ? "

" Oh, I — caught cold or something ; and then there was a fire at the school-house and I lost nearly everything I had. "

" Were you in the school-house when it burned ? "

" No. I was visiting the Ansteys — those curious old folks and dear friends of mine I've told you about. "

" What, the medicine people ? "

" Yes ; and the woman who said, ' Go read yer book, ' to any of her children that needed punishment. "

"Oh, yes — I remember — and their pigs got smothered in snow!"

"So they did. Let me see, where was I?"

"You were just going to tell us about Mr. Prouder."

"Oh, was I? Well; everybody helped me, and I got over my misfortunes and came here — and here I am — and that's all!"

"But, Mamma, you have n't told us about papa," said Meg.

"Oh, no; I forgot. Well, he was born in Massachusetts, too, but I never saw him till I came to Wayback. He came first, and taught school, but when I got there he was clerk at the tavern. He was alone in the world, like me; and so — we got married. And then my twinnies were born and I have been a happy woman ever since." She gathered them both in her arms and pressed them to her face, glowing with the joy of motherhood; Meg as usual returning her caress with interest, and Phil as usual submitting with patience until he should be released.

"All I ask," she added, "is that we may be commonplace and happy all our lives, and all die together, and be buried together at last."

"I can *almost* remember papa before he went to California and died," said Meg, her eyes softening with dutiful regret.

"I can quite remember him," said her brother, "because he rode a horse."

"Now, my children, have n't I been good to tell you such a long story?"

"Lovely-good!" cried Meg.

"Well, then, promise me one thing in return: that you will never talk about any of the things I have told you. Will you remember?"

Meg promised, but Phil said:—

"I want to thank Mr. Prouder for being good to you. Meanest man in Spring County, and yet good to my mother!"

"Philip! Do you wish to make me seriously angry?"

The boy's face settled into a stony frown of obstinacy and determination that always frightened his mother, but she held her ground.

"March off to your bed, sir."

"I have n't had my supper yet."

"Do as I bid you,"—and Mrs. McVey rose as for a battle royal, and Phil slowly prepared to obey.

"It's my bath night."

"Take the tub and Meg will bring you your towel and soap."

"Nice and clean I'll be with just towel and soap and no water."

"Dip a pailful out of the rain-water barrel."

He did as he was bid, taking care to spill a little water on the clean bare floor as he passed through the room.

Sad, spare, and lonely was the supper eaten by the mother and daughter, both wishing that each mouthful could go into Phil's mouth instead of theirs.

But Phil's window was low, and apples were

ripe and near at hand. When he was ready for bed, his single scanty and airy garment might have seen fitting about in the darkness outside, and when he climbed in he found on the window-ledge a piece of bread and butter with honey between: so that he had all the materials for one of the finest apple-pies that can be imagined — all it needed was the mixing, which he forthwith proceeded to accomplish.

And the fun of it was that Anne knew all about the apples as well as Phil did, and all about the other viands as well as Meg did.

After Meg, too, had finished her work and gone to bed, Anne proceeded to clear up Phil's room. He was so sound asleep that she could venture to fondle the young rebel a little, and console herself for having been severe with him.

How clean a newly-washed little boy is! The little girl is clean almost as a matter of course, but the boy's cleanliness is express, intentional, conspicuous. His firm flesh and pink skin seem like a casting, fresh from nature's mould, fragrant with pure vigor.

No allusion to the little misunderstanding was made next morning; though breakfast was rather more silent than usual. They all set out for the meeting-house, the awkwardness gradually wearing off.

"Oh, Phil! See! What can be the matter with that horse? He's tied, but he seems to be trying to get loose, or throw himself down, or something. Is he crazy?"

"Pretty near, I guess, with a greenhead on him somewhere where he can't get at it." He skipped across the street, found one of those cruel pests on the horse's neck, and killed it with a resounding smack ; and then scratched the bitten part while the relieved steed arched his neck and leaned it toward his benefactor with an unmistakable pleasure — almost gratitude — delightful to behold. Then Phil looked ruefully at the malodorous horse-blood and fly-remains on his Sunday-clean hand ; stooped to clean it on the grass, and scraped it savagely on the trunks of trees he passed in rejoining his mother and Meg.

"Is n't he good and kind, Mother?"

"Sometimes, Meg, — to dumb brutes."

"My brother is always kind ! He just loves to give pleasure and relieve pain ! Why, if nobody is looking, Phil will lift a beetle out of the path to keep it from being trodden on ! The dogs all know him and love to come and lick his feet !"

"Yes, — he is sometimes very kind."

"But, Mamma ! What ever can you mean ? When is Phil any other way ?"

"When he persists in prying into things distressing to his mother. Then he is very cruel."

"Oh, Phil ! Do you hear that ? Cruel to Mother !"

Phil evidently heard it, and was painfully struck with it, as with a new view of his behavior. His face flushed and he winked rapidly in unmistakable emotion. Meg continued : —

"You won't do so any more, will you, Phil ?"

He only gave a little shake of the head; but his mother and sister knew that this from him meant all that could be promised by solemn oaths. That mute engagement settled the matter "for good and all."

He knew that he was forgiven; for when, in church, he asked permission to take off his hot, torturing shoes, his mother granted it with a nod and a smile.

In these days Phil had his little kit of tools at the cottage. The brackets, the hinges, the door-locks, and bolts and buttons were all in his charge; and, *mirabile dictu!* he could even mend the clock! His jack-knife was never lost (hand or pocket its only resting-place) and was always sharp, as his left-hand forefinger, covered with a net-work of scars, abundantly testified.

Whenever school "kept," thither tended his little bare feet, with rags sewed around the stubbed toes by his mother's and sister's pitying hands.

These were the days when literature first opened to him her radiant palace of delight — when reading changed from a weary task to a glorious privilege. The transformation was as if one unknowing of telephones should be holding to his ear the ugly "receiver," and suddenly, like the opening of a door, it should become vocal with the sound of a choir of angel voices singing the music of the spheres.

But always the same beloved little boy; strong and helpful, and willful and obstinate — comfort, puzzle, and wonder to the others.

CHAPTER III.

THE MILL AND THE BROKEN LEG.

SLOWLY to themselves, swiftly to their mother, Phil and Meg grew to their "teens." The boy's mind did not change its bent; but its stronger grasp seized upon stronger things. Certain pattering water-wheels driven by a shady brook that crept down toward Spring River, near the town, had been his dear delight for several summers; now they were supplanted in his affections by the heavy shafting, the intricate gearing, the whirling stones, the shaking and roar of a real mill.

And yet it was only nature's play. The river came running down, babbling and insignificant, scarcely a pool of it deep enough to swim in; but when it met the mill-dam, and part of its stream, turning idly aside, threaded its sluggish way through the mill-race, over the water-weeds, and under the willows and alders until it reached the flume and filled the buckets of the great wheel, what an awful strength it suddenly put forth! So huge were even the most insignificant powers of Mother Earth when compared with the strength of a man — and so mighty was the mind of man to capture those powers and break them to harness.

One day he met with an accident. Arriving home much earlier than usual, he called out from the road : —

“ Mother and Meg ! See how well I could walk on crutches if I had to ! ”

Mother and Meg came to window and door in response to the invitation, and there to be sure was master Philip trudging manfully up the walk, his coat showing marks of having rolled on the mill floor, one foot in the air and an extemporized crutch under each arm. Meg saw the crutches, took it for a joke, and cried : —

“ For shame, Phil ! You ’ll frighten Mother to death ! ”

Then Anne came to the door — gave one look and one scream : —

“ Oh ! It has come ! The axe has fallen ! ”

As she screamed she covered her eyes and leaned against the door-post. It was but a moment of weakness ; then she stepped quickly out and said : —

“ I see you are hurt—but we will make the best of it.”

She helped him in, laid him on the lounge, sent Meg away with the rude crutches and to bring water ; bravely removed the shoe and stocking from the rather grimy foot, and rolled up the trousers past where the leg showed that hideous outward contortion which tells of the fracture of one of the bones — the fibula.

Only once more did she give way, and that was when he did ; giving a half-suppressed cry as the

bone-ends grated together. Then she clasped his head to the breast which had nourished it, murmuring: "My son! My dear — my dear-bought boy!"

She took the water from Meg and held it to Phil's bloodless lips, saying:

"Run, Daughter, for Dr. Strafford!"

"Oh, they are after him," said Phil. "Lamb brought me in the wagon as far as the corner; but I told him to let me come on alone, for fear you'd think I was killed — and go for the doctor; so he has gone."

"And here he comes," cried trembling Meg.

"Well, Phil," called the cheery voice of the young surgeon. "All broken into little bits?"

"Not broken at all. Only bent: see, Doctor?"

"Ah yes — bent; I see. But some things must break before they'll bend like that." Then as he prepared with light touches to make a thorough examination, he added: "Now, my boy, when I hurt, don't be afraid to let the world know it. *Holler* right out."

"Holler? Why, Doctor? — I thought this would be a good time to try what kind of a boy I was for grit."

"Do as I say, my boy. I'm managing this case, and you have got nothing to say about it. Leave it all to me."

"Yes, — but here's Mother and Meg, you see."

"See here, Phil, if you don't promise to yell, I'll promise to try to make you! and I guess I'll have my way, after all!"

"Well, Doctor, — if Mother and Meg will get out of hearing" —

"Meg shall go, my son; but you'll trust your own mother to be brave, won't you? There, — Meg dear, run away to the minister's house and come back in — how long, doctor?"

"Oh, Lamb is coming along with splints and things; I think we shall be all comfortable in half an hour — or say three quarters."

Heart-broken Meg, in wild-eyed terror, too frightened even to cry, made her way out through the little group of curious villagers gathered about the gate, gaping at the door and windows, where there was nothing to be seen and therefore so much to be imagined.

"Hurt to the mill, was he? Leg run threw a cog-wheel, likely! | Gee Rusalem | 'T ain't likely | they kin save it! | But then, Doc Strafford kin ef anybody kin!"

"As fer me, I'd a heap sight druther die, than t' have my leg cut off 'n' be a cripple fer life!"

And then the poor girl clapped her hands to her ears and "run like a scairt cat," as the observers feelingly remarked.

Anne found it decidedly less hard than she had expected, — as she always did find terrors bravely faced. Can a mother hold her boy's hands and wipe the starting drops from his forehead while strong men are pulling at his broken leg? Well, whether she could or not, she did. She even found voice to say, after the first sharp cry, that she would rather hear him cry out than see him

hold in a cry that he wanted to utter. Then he confessed that the cry was a relief; and the busy doctor overheard and joined in:—

“You’ve struck it, Phil! In the hospital I always noticed that the fellow who expressed his sentiments freely on the operating table was less likely to be feverish afterward than the fellow that just resolved to grin and bear it.”

After this clear understanding was arrived at, things were on a very tolerable footing. Anguish was a recognized phenomenon—a thing to be studied and talked about. Phil announced:—

“If you’ll stand my howling, doctor, I’ll stand your pulling;” and howl he did with a will. To be present was truly far less harrowing than it would have been to be out of sight, though within hearing.

“Ou—uch!” roared the boy, and then looked up in Anne’s face with a reassuring smile.

“That was a fine loud one, was n’t it, Doctor? I’ll do better yet, next time.”

“Next time, my fine fellow, will be next time you break your leg. We’re all done. Nothing to do now but make fast—belay all as we say at sea—and let nature get in her work.”

“All done! Oh pshaw! Is that all? Why, I’m quite disappointed!”

He withdrew his hands from his mother’s, turned his face to the wall, and fell almost instantly sound asleep in his exhaustion.

After a few whispered words to Anne, and a promise to come in again soon, the good doctor

went away. As he passed out of the gate he had to make his way through the little crowd of curiosity-drawn horror-seekers, who had been enjoying the boy's cries with all the strange satisfaction of the spectators of a stage tragedy. One of the awe-struck group ventured to voice the question that all wanted to ask.

"Doc, is he — is he — dead?"

"Dead?" roared the doctor. "Dead? Why should he be dead? Do I look like a murderer? He couldn't be dead unless I'd killed him!"

"I did n't know but he was hurt so bad — they had it all over town that Phil had been run through the mill."

"Run through thunder! Just one bone broken in one place! A good boil on his neck would hurt him just as much and be just as likely to kill him!" And he hurried on.

He had a message to deliver to Polander Brothers, Anne's employers; and as he approached the store he met a highly excited man, in farmer-like garb, who almost ran over him. Guessing his destination, the doctor stopped him.

"Were you going to the Widow McVey's?" The other tried to swallow the lump in his throat and nodded speechless. "Well, I would n't go just now — the boy's asleep."

"Asleep? Not dead? Oh, thank the Lord!"

"Not dead, nor likely to be. Nothing but a simple fracture of the leg."

"Wa'l, thar naow! I might 'a' knowed the blame fool way that things gits told! Be yew th' doctor?"

"Yes, I'm Dr. Strafford."

"Wal, naow, see h'yer, Doctor — I'm fr'm Way-back, whar th' widder useter live — 'n' I've heered a goodle abaout her — in fact I useter kind o' know her myself. 'N' what I want'er say is this — ef she's any way short o' money — I've got a leetle jag tucked away somewh'ers — 't ain't much, but mebbe it mought help aout some," and he lugged out a huge plethoric breast-pocket-book of dubious hue.

"Oh, certainly. What might your name be?"

"Praouder, — Zury Praouder, the' call me, mostly."

"Oh, Mr. Prouder! Glad to see you! I'm a new-comer here, but yet I've heard of you."

"Wal, that's all right. But you hain't no special call t' mention what I've be'n a-sayin', I s'pose?"

"Certainly not; if you say so."

"Good enough! I see you're the right kind of a man." Then more cautiously: "I ain't a-givin' on ye no giner'l c'mission t' spend what ye're a mineter 'n' call on me t' make it good, y' understand. On'y jest keep yer eyes open, 'n' I'll drop in t' yer office nex' week 'n' ye kin jest mention where ye'llow th't a leetle o' th' ready john would do th' boy any good, 'n' ef I kin any way fix it, why I might, — by borryin' er some-haow."

"All right, Mr. Prouder! I don't believe there will be any occasion for money, but if it arises I'll let you know."

"That's all O. K. But — oh Lord! I wuz a-thinkin' it mought be usefle fer funer'l expenses!" And he laughed aloud as he walked away. Looking back he called out, "Mum's the word, ye know!"

The doctor nodded and went on to do his errand, thinking to himself:—

"Well, the world is not so bad after all! Think of that unpromising-looking rustic wanting to do a good deed and to keep it a secret!" Then his thoughts went back to the cottage. "Small sacrifice for any man to be generous to her! How she looked, caring for her boy! Let's see — what was it? One of Raphael's faces, I think. Oh, yes — *Madonna della Seggiola*!" (He did not get the exact woman, but came reasonably near.)

They soon got Phil to bed, but that was a rather wild night at the cottage for Anne and Meg and the doctor. There were the feverish symptoms, inevitable though slight. He "wandered" a little sometimes, saying, "It was *not* the axe that fell! It was the grindstone, I tell you!"

The growing discomfort of the splints and bandages was perhaps more distressing than the positive local pain which "howling" could alleviate. This was wearing, wearying, heart-wrenching, patience-killing misery. Anne and Strafford were surprised, each that the other did not suggest morphine; and each was prepared to give a reluctant assent if the other had done so; but

fortunately both were at least a generation ahead of their time in their horror of the anodyne, so it was not spoken of. Just at daylight, when the doctor made some slight alleviation of the pressure of the splints, poor Phil, with a low, sweet gurgle of relief, "Ah, that's it! That's it!" fell into a natural slumber; and the fever softened into a gentle perspiration soon afterward.

The doctor looked at Anne with a reassuring smile, which met her eyes full of happy tears. Then she went and knelt down by a lounge and bowed her forehead on her folded hands.

CHAPTER IV.

CONVALESCENCE.

STRAFFORD sat long and quietly, looking from one to the other, while the night changed to day ; the window-panes turning slowly from black squares to white squares as the dawn approached ; pale, then bright, then rosy — always lovely. He thought Anne was communing with heaven. So she was ; an earthly heaven, where her son was well and strong as he had been at this time yesterday.

When the doctor arose to put out the lamp he saw by some slight movement that Anne was awake, and he went softly to her side and whispered : —

“ Please go to bed ! ”

She did not speak, but lifted to him her hand — soft and fair ; all white, save where there were little marks of yesterday’s book-keeping — and clasped his with a pressure that spoke her thanks more eloquently than words could have done. Suddenly recollecting herself she raised her head, rose, and beckoned him out of the room.

“ How thoughtless I am ! ” she said in a low voice. “ Care makes me utterly selfish ! Why have I not offered you something to eat and drink ? ”

"Bless my heart! I never thought of it till you spoke."

"Well, stay here and I will find something in a moment. Oh — here's Meg! My darling, it's all right! He is sleeping beautifully! What made you get up?"

"Oh, Mother, I'm so ashamed at having been asleep! It was cruel of you to make me go to bed while you've been watching all night!"

"No, dear — it was kind to us both. Now, you see, you are all ready to take your turn. The first thing you can do is to go and get Doctor Strafford some supper — or breakfast, whichever you like to call it."

"Now, Mrs. McVey, your daughter shall get the breakfast and I will eat it, on one condition, that you go to bed yourself."

"Oh, Doctor, suppose he should wake and ask for me!"

"Well, if he does, we will call you. But," he went and listened to Phil's breathing, "I think he'll sleep longer than you will."

"Oh, do you think so?" she asked, with a joyful sob in her utterance. "Well, then, I'll go."

She went over and softly kissed the cruel, rigid splint; its hardness seeming intensified by the tight bandage that covered it. Then she went to bed, and in her intense weariness of soul and body she took, in the next two hours, almost the value of a whole night's sleep.

At about the usual breakfast time Phil called out: —

"Hello! Oh, yes, I remember!" Then he raised himself on his elbow and looked at his leg—then felt of the unresponsive splints. "Phloogee, what a leg! Why, doctor, have you been here all night? What time did I go to sleep?"

His mother heard his voice in her room, and sprang broad awake. She went to Phil's door, but seeing Dr. Strafford, started back to make herself more presentable, only calling from a safe distance for news of her boy's welfare. (One need not be seen looking absolutely repulsive, even if one is a poor widow.)

By the time she had smoothed her plumage a little, the doctor had made Phil comfortable, and neat-handed Meg had got breakfast ready. They all ate the meal *à la* picnic in Phil's room, the patient himself taking a respectable share in the eating and the talking.

"What was I going on about in the night? I thought I'd heard Mother say the axe had fallen on my leg. Did you, Mother?"

"Well, if I did, it was only that the metaphorical axe had fallen at last and put an end to my—to our happiness."

"Oh, is that all? Well, what troubled me was mistaking that great heavy grindstone for an axe! You see, while I was turning grindstone for Lamb to grind all the picks he dresses the mill-stones with, I got tired of the job, and invented a way to make the mill-shaft do the work. It was just to pass a rope round the mill-shaft and round the shaft of the grindstone; then fasten

the ends of the rope together ; and when the shaft turns, the grindstone has got to turn, too."

" Good idea, Phil. How did you try to work it? "

" Why, Doctor, I explained it to Lamb and he approved of it, and promised to show me how to splice the rope, when he had time. But I could n't wait : I just tied the rope in a knot, and set the grindstone going first rate. It worked so beautifully that I stood there watching it. It went like fun ! The knot traveled around the two shafts, back and forward, like a racer, and the stone went round like the wind. But by and by the blamed knot took a notion to catch on the grindstone frame and pulled it over, *bim !* Took me in the leg and laid me low ! "

" Might better have waited for the splice. Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well. "

" Yes ; I 'll wait for the splice next time. "

" Next time ? " cried Meg. " You 'll never go near that dreadful shaft again, I hope. "

" Won't I ? Just you see ! How long before I can get out, Doctor ? "

" Oh, five weeks, maybe ; if you are careful and don't get a set-back. "

" Five weeks ? All right ! In just five weeks and half an hour I 'll have my patent working again. "

" Well, " said the doctor, laughing ; " we 'll see. Perhaps between now and then I 'll take time to put in the splice for you myself. "

"What! Can you splice?"

"Oh, yes. I've been to sea. Can hand, reef, and steer; make a grummet splice, and turn a matthew-walker-knot on a chain cable, as the sailors say."

"Splendid! But don't set the stone going till I come!"

"Oh, no. I'll not steal your invention. I'm a little of an inventor myself. We mechanics must stick together, you know."

"But, oh dear! Five weeks is a long time, now is n't it?"

"Well, that depends on how you spend it. It's 'owing' to how you spend it, as folks say here. How far on are you in arithmetic?"

"Compound proportion."

"Good enough! Have you a natural eye for measurements — lengths and distances?"

"Oh, I guess so. You know how much chance a boy has for such things. 'The length of the hammer-handle and *so much* more makes a foot.' That's the kind of measurements a boy makes."

"Well, I'll bring you over an elementary work on surveying."

"Learn to lay out farms and town-lots, like old Shimp?" asked the boy, doubtfully.

"Bigger game than that. What would you say to a — railroad?"

"A railroad! What? Where? When?"

"Here — now — right-away-quick."

"Where from and where to?"

"Springville — Danfield — and other places."

"Oh, that will be splendid! Yes; bring the surveying-book. Perhaps I shall be glad I broke my leg, before I get through!"

The book was brought, and by the doctor's help rapidly mastered. This and the surgical care required, of course, a good many visits from Strafford, some of them tea-visits, and a few — quite rarely — day-visits. (Anne was away at the office in the daytime.)

A better boy than Phil during this enforced quiet has rarely been seen. Never afterward could his mother and sister look back on the "splint time" without a thrill of loving memory. Beside studying the surveying, he whittled for himself, with Strafford's help, a "magnificent" pair of crutches, padding them at the arm-places and ironing them at the bottom. He even learned to knit, and made himself a "magnificent" pair of mittens for next winter. The right mitten had a fine long wrist and was entirely finished by him; but then he began to get well, and, alas, the left had a very short wrist, and Meg had to put in the thumb, after all.

Dr. Strafford found himself, every day, through all his varied occupations, looking forward with impatience to his evening at Phil's side; Phil's mother somewhere within sight or hearing. From the first their friendship grew apace; seemed to promise to become intimacy. Strafford did not know how hungry he had been to meet such a person as Anne. Every night there was a little attention (whether called for or not) given to the

“celebrated leg.” Phil was interesting, Meg a pattern of excellence and devotion — but the widow! Words could hardly tell how charming she seemed to him at home.

He had never heard that she had been a writer, and so his acquaintance with her seemed like the rising of a miraculous sun on his sombre work-day horizon. Wit and humor of a woman of the world, manners of a lady, voice of a singing-bird, gayety of a girl, and gravity of a woman! And then her beauty — but of course this was nonsense, at her age!

After a week of this free and jolly intercourse he observed some trouble peeping through. Anne would greet him with a kind of reserve; would show a little polite surprise at seeing him again so soon; would leave him alone with the young folks and betake herself to her own room, sewing in hand, shortly after his arrival. Could it be that he was not welcome? If so, why? Surely he could not have given offense by being personal in his attentions to her — *yet*. Well, he would stay away a day or two, unless sent for, and try that.

A day or two! Mercy! if it was so hard to keep clear of the house that first evening, what could he do on other evenings? His books, his experiments, his friends, his occasional game of billiards — all were suddenly become perfect bores to him. So on the next evening, heedlessly coming within the sight of the cottage, he found himself drawn thither irresistibly, and fairly opening the gate before he knew it.

Anne received him with the reserved cordiality usual of late, but Phil was more explosive.

"Why, hello, Doctor! Where were you last night? Are you forgetting us already? My leg is a great deal worse, I thank you, and I think it's coming off."

"Your leg coming off? Why that's a pity! Let me see if I can paste it on again."

"No, not my leg, but the big splint is coming off."

"Oh, I guess not, until I take it off," said the doctor, undoing the bandages as usual.

"Phil, my son," said Anne, "you must not expect to have a learned doctor at your beck and call forever. You know we're poor folks, and Dr. Strafford has a great many more profitable patients than you can ever be."

Strafford stopped his operations at this, and was motionless for several seconds. Then he went on in angry silence. So this was the trouble, was it? She was thinking of a bill, — a doctor's bill!

Phil rattled on about his own affairs.

"Have you been at the mill, Doctor?"

No answer for some time, and then, with a start— "At the mill? No — I mean yes; I made that splice yesterday."

"Hurrah! Is it a good one?"

"Yes, I guess it will do."

"I went on to the place you marked in the book, and then you didn't come to examine me on it, so I ran through the next chapter. It's

getting so easy that I scarcely have to read it more than once."

When Strafford had finished his unwinding and re-winding, he went out into the hall and sent Meg for her mother. When the latter appeared he began, very grimly : —

"Mrs. McVey ; from what you said to Phil, I fear that you regard all these calls as professional visits."

"Certainly. Why not?"

"And that I am running up a surgical bill against you?"

"Yes, indeed! I am not rich, but I always pay my just debts."

"Very well, then, I'll go! Good-night, madam!"

He was often a little hot-tempered (except with suffering patients ; they could *never* make him angry), and stepped quickly to the door where he usually left his hat. But this evening, luckily, he had taken it into Phil's room with him, so he had to turn round and pass Anne again, where she stood silent and surprised. She had been all ready to take offense if he offered any *charity* to her and hers ; but when she saw his flushed face and lowered brows, and the angry light in his eyes, she saw, too, the man who had bent over her son in his anguish, and had spent that long, short summer night with her at the boy's bedside.

So as he came again out of the room she broke down.

"Oh, Dr. Strafford! What have I done?" she

cried with tears in her voice. "Are you angry with me?"

"I — am hurt ; that is all."

"Oh, dear me ! What shall I do ? Don't go away so !" and she laid her hands on his arm. "We owe you more than we can ever repay ! Such skill and such tenderness, and such generous devotion of time and thought and sympathy !"

His face softened and brightened into a smile, and he took her two hands in his.

"Well, I'll forgive you, on one condition — that you'll never again speak, or even think, of paying me a dollar for any service, past or future."

"Oh, Dr. Strafford," she said, taking her hands away, "you ask *too* much now. I cannot consent to that."

"Well, then, I'll compromise with you. I will take some money" (he named a ridiculously small sum) ; "but not from you, from Phil ; the first money he earns by his surveying."

"Well, just let me pay it now, and then he can pay me."

"Not a penny ! Your money would burn my fingers."

She was forced to consent. What could she do ? So they all gathered again in Phil's room once more and spent one of their happiest evenings. The doctor was in wild spirits, and the rest caught some of the contagion.

But Anne was a little doubtful and hesitating. She did not feel at all sure that things were going on quite as they should.

CHAPTER V.

THE PIONIC.

How fast Phil got well ! There was a little space of tiresome pain "when the bone began to knit," as the doctor told him ; and when, later, he himself learned to knit, he wondered if the mitten ached at being knitted as his leg did. Then the skin began itching so savagely that he thrust pins through the bandages and scratched it until the cloth was stained with blood. But in a few days he was helping himself all about the house and the yard, the knee of the "wooden leg" supported on a chair ; and a very little later his "magnificent" crutches were brought into play.

"But, Doctor, how big that lump of bone is growing. Looks to me as if you'd made a knot there instead of a splice."

"I have n't made either knot or splice, my boy. It's Mother Nature that's done the work and is doing it — I've merely fixed it so that she could work at the best advantage. That's all the best doctor can do in any case."

"Why — can't a doctor cure anything?"

"Cure? Do you know what cure means?"

"Make it well, I suppose."

"No! Did you ever study Latin?"

"Just a little speck. Mother taught me a little, in the evening; until I behaved so bad about it she had to give it up."

"Bad! To your mother?" This was all the doctor said, but he thought to himself, "What blind, insensate, brutal clods boys are! Think of any human being capable of rebelling against *her* offered kindness!" Then aloud:—

"Well; if you looked in your dictionary, you would find that 'cure' comes from *curare*, to care for. That is all any doctor can do — *care* for the patient while Nature is healing him."

"Well, I wish Nature would *curare* my leg without making a big lump there!"

"She won't, though the lump will grow a *little* smaller. She does her work with wonderful strength; but without the slightest regard to looks. If I had never touched your leg she would have mended it up strong as ever — or stronger — but all crooked as it was when I began, and with a lump on it as big as your elbow!"

"Bigger than this?"

"Certainly! The ends of the bone not being matched together, she would have wrapped stuff about both the overlapped fragments, enough to make them all into one mass again."

"Well, doctor, on the whole, I think I'm glad you came!"

"Spite of all the pain I have given you?"

"Oh, you dear old boy!" and the youth hugged his friend's arm with a fervor that went far beyond any demonstration of tender feeling he

ordinarily betrayed, even toward Anne or Meg. The surgeon liked it, and the mother and sister looked on with pleasure — and envy.

As the boy got well, he and his benefactor grew almost inseparable. Surgical practice in Springville was not very engrossing; and as to merely medical calls, Strafford was but little sought for. People were not fond of a doctor of whom they said : —

“ Oh, Doc Strafford, he don’t *do* noth’n’! I want a man ’t ’ll give me good, strong, black med’cine, th’t tastes bad; stuff th’t ’ll cure me — er do t’other thing.”

“ Well, Phil; Lamb tells me he’s anxious to have a boy of about your size come ’round to turn grindstone for him. The millstones are getting very smooth, and his picks are all dull.”

“ Anxious, is he? Well, Doctor, somehow I don’t feel so anxious as I did to turn grindstone for Sam Lamb.”

“ Well, but how about setting Sam Lamb’s grindstone to turning of itself?”

“ Oh, I’m right on *that*! When can we go?”

“ I came over to see. Let me look at your leg. There — do you feel that?”

“ Oh — ouch! No, I don’t!”

“ Oh-ouch-no-I-don’t is a contradiction in terms. A paradox all in one word. Well, I’ll bring the gray round to-morrow afternoon and we’ll see if you can keep quiet after we get to the mill so that no harm can come of our experiment.”

Phil and the crutches being safely loaded into the wagon, the doctor drove to the mill. An old grooved pulley was found and fitted to the shaft of the grindstone; the frame of the stone was accurately squared toward the mill-shaft, and firmly braced to the floor; then the spliced rope was "shipped," and the stone began turning, silent and swift, in a manner that did Phil's mechanical soul good to contemplate. Again he had the dear delight which a practical mind finds in guiding natural forces to do human work. Spring River was turning the grindstone! He had sometimes turned, and turned, and *turned*, until he was so tired that nothing but pride kept him from begging off: now it went of itself! Nobody tired! They called Sam Lamb to see their success. Sam's eyes glistened at the sight; but he had enough presence of mind to avoid "slopping over."

"Oh, I see! Ya-as, that looks all O. K. 'Course I could 'a' done it myself ef I could ever 'a' took the time. Rope 'll be pootty apt t' slip, I reckon. Belt 'd a be'n a heap sight better."

When they had finished their task, Strafford hurried off Phil toward home.

"Oh, Doctor! Can't we drive a little way down river?"

"You've been out long enough for a first time, Phil."

Anne and Meg came out to meet them, and each carried in a crutch, while Strafford lugged the invalid indoors, "pickapack."

"Mrs. McVey," said the doctor, as if the idea had suddenly struck him, "why not jump in and let me take you for a little drive?"

"Oh, how nice!" cried she, on the impulse of the moment; then she added: "If I only could. But I cannot."

"Oh, do, Mother," cried both the children. "You never go anywhere but to the horrid old store day after day!"

"True, true, children; and this is one of the days after days when I never go anywhere but to the horrid old store."

Urgency was unavailingly tried; Anne evidently had reasons of her own. At last she said:—

"Meg would love to drive with you, Doctor."

"Certainly — I should be delighted," said Strafford, concealing his chagrin so that Meg might not shrink from the proposed plan. And all through an hour's drive he labored so successfully to be agreeable that the unconscious girl never suspected the annoyance that rankled in his breast; disappointment that *she* should be sitting in the place where he had been fondly hoping to have her mother.

"Dear boy!" thought Anne to herself as they drove off, "I feel a little as if he were my younger brother—or older son. Then she could not do less than ask him to return to tea after disposing of his horse; and they had a pleasant evening. It was not so hilarious as others had been; because Strafford was too much in love to be as

good company as before he fell into the lackadaisical frame of mind.

When saying good-night, the doctor stammered out, in a tone that showed he was hoping against hope: —

“Could you — name any day when you might like to drive?”

“Well,” she laughed, “I’ll let you know a day or two in advance, if I see my way clear.” But when he had gone, her heart relented far enough to let her send Meg after him to say that if he wished they might make up a little picnic for July Fourth. He jumped at the chance, and did not go home quite so wretched after all.

He made delightful arrangements for the picnic, leaving not the slightest burden for busy Anne, lame Phil, and willing but youthful Meg.

“Mrs. McVey, why should n’t Meg and Phil ask some of their young friends to meet us on the Fourth at the grove by the river?”

“Why not!” cried Anne. “Certainly they shall.” And she added to herself, “You dear goosey, you think I don’t know that you are hoping the young folks will flock off together and leave you a clear field! Well, if you can stand it, I can.”

By the arrival of the “Glorious Fourth” Phil was quite well, though the doctor still urged caution, and he was deputed to drive the gray. The wagon was loaded with so many pots and pans and fishing-poles and baskets and rugs and other paraphernalia that there was scarcely room for

another, so Phil drove slowly while the others walked alongside. Arrived at the ground, they found that Strafford had been there beforehand and made things beautifully easy. A fire was already started, and some stones getting hot to cook fish in. And when Anne hung up her shade-hat, rolled up the sleeves from her shapely wrists, and announced herself ready for work, lo! there was no work to do. She would have helped unload the wagon, but the doctor seemed so pained that she gave it up, sat down on the tree-trunk where he placed a rug to mark her throne, and looked on in pleased inaction.

It was a new sensation to find herself cared for and waited on at every turn. Strafford took her to a good fishing place, baited her hook, and showed her how to cast it. Then when almost instantly she felt a tug which bent the rod far down, while the line went flying about, cutting the water like a knife, he told her what it meant, — that a black bass had taken her hook, — directed her how to land the fish, and took it from the hook, strung it on a line anchored at the water's edge, baited her hook again, and, while she waited for another bite, made his own line ready and joined the sport.

"Why, fishing is glorious! Why did I never know of this before?"

"Because you did n't have me to teach you, of course!"

He pulled down her sleeves, and insisted on her putting on a pair of his gloves to keep her skin

from getting burned, and they fished with varying luck till it was near dinner-time. Then he let her go to set the table, while he prepared some of the finest of the finny beauties for the stones, and freed the small fry to go on their way rejoicing.

Salt? Yes, plenty of it. Leaves to wrap the fish in? Myriads of them. Hot stones to lay them between? Of course, — what else was fire ever created for except to heat stones to cook fish with? The boys had caught a lot, too; if they would make them ready, they might have them cooked — otherwise they could dine without fish; he had only enough for Mrs. McVey and Meg.

How delicious those fish were when seasoned and buttered! Anne had never tasted anything like it in her life. When they had eaten all they possibly could, the girls were given water, hot and cold, and all other appliances, and set at washing the dishes; while Anne, with small urging, sang them a song. As being appropriate to the place if not to the occasion she chose "Bonnie Doon," and almost as soon as she began, Stafford joined with a good second.

"Oh, Doctor, can you whistle a second to that?"

"Certainly — but who can do the air?"

"Listen!" And puckering her lips into the *kissiest* shape imaginable, she whistled the tune in tones clear, feminine, and flute-like; while he gazed at her, spell-bound, and whistled second; and they made some of the sweetest, strangest, weirdest double tones that ear ever heard. No

one who has not heard two good whistlers together can conceive of those sounds.

Another general adjournment to the river bank ; and lots of fun "skipping" stones on the water. The doctor could skip them clear across the stream — four skips and a landing on the other bank ; so could Phil. Anne, after many trials and lots of instruction, could make a stone skip once — then twice. Then her wrist fell lame, and required much of Strafford's attention ; her handkerchief wound round wet, and his wound dry outside it. Then he thought she might better go back to the throne and sit down. He held her hand to help her up the bank, and kept hold after they got up on the level. After she had resumed her seat she tried to withdraw the hand ; but did not try very hard.

He took the carriage cushion to improve her throne and the carriage seat for her to put her feet on — her "little feet," he called them, though they were not very little.

"Perhaps I can magnetize all the strain out of your wrist. May I try?"

"If you wish." Then he took her hand in both his.

"Do you believe in animal magnetism?"

"I used to believe in all the follies that were afloat. Now I'm afraid I don't believe in any of them." ("How strong your hands are.")

"Afraid?"

"Why, yes. It is one mark of advancing age to lose all one's delusions — and illusions."

"Oh! don't let them all get away — all the things it is fashionable to call illusions. Let us keep tight hold on the sweetest and best of all."

She laughed, gayly. "You are still under their spell. Wait till you have arrived at years of discretion — as I have."

His face fell at this needless dragging in of the fact that he was younger than she, and they were silent for a time — the magnetizing still proceeding. She thought to herself, "Well — I may as well let him go on and have it over with. Poor boy! How he rushes upon his fate!"

"Is your wrist better?"

"Oh, yes, quite well except when you turn it up and sidewise in one direction — there, so."

"Well, I don't want it to get well too soon. Slow cures are best." ("Oh, how deeply crafty you are, are n't you!") "I knew a woman who made too much haste to discharge her doctor, and what do you think happened to her?"

"I can't guess." (A little blush and a dimple.)

"In a few minutes her bones whitened the plain!"

"Oh horror! And what became of the doctor?"

"He married and lived happy ever after."

"The wretch!"

"Yes — he was a base miscreant and low criminal." ("How nicely your boyish hair grows on your manly forehead!") "But then it was n't his fault — she drove him to it."

"How?"

"By saying she was all well and he must n't come any more."

"Oh, I see! And then did her bones begin whitening the plain?"

"Yes; she grew pale, and — what do you think? — she lost her beauty!"

"Did she, indeed?" ("How your eyes blaze, you silly fellow!") "And he never cared a bit!"

"Did n't he? He never knew what happiness meant after she drove him away. By day or by night, on land or sea, her image haunted him forever!" ("Intoxication makes you eloquent, my dear boy!") "Awake he thought of her, asleep he dreamed of her, and every succeeding moment it was new torture."

"Dear me! I thought you said he married and lived happy ever after!"

"Did I? Well, if I said so that was the fact. But do you know why?"

"Well — because that is the nature of his sex, I suppose."

"No. It was because I was not he. It was another doctor entirely."

"But if it had been you?"

"Oh! she *could n't* have sent *me* away. She would have had to be more or less than human to murder me in cold blood."

"But if she had. If she had told you to go, with reasons which even you would own were unanswerable."

"Why, then — then I hope I should bear it like a man." ("Oh, how delightful you are when you are grave like that!") "But it would be

hard — hard!" He bent over her hand as if he would have kissed it; but did not venture. Something told him that *that* would have put an end to everything, then and there. ("Oh, suppose I were to pretend to acquiesce for a minute — for an hour — for this one afternoon — before I cut the ground from under his feet! But I will not — I will not — it would be too wicked even for *me!*") Then aloud: —

"What romantic nonsense you young folks get into your foolish heads! As I said before, wait till you come to my age! You'll find that life-long sentimental anguish lasts about a day and a half! It is quite another kind of regret which endures forever!"

"Taunting me again with my youth, are you? Now, Mrs. McVey, perhaps I'm neither so young nor so poor as I pretend to be." ("Verdancy! Trying to let me see how well you could care for me, and fancying I don't see through the transparent device!") "You see, when I began to practice here I thought it best not to 'put on scollops,' as the Westerners say. And, besides, my mother needed the little patrimony as long as she lived; but now" (a sigh) "she needs it no longer." Then, after a pause: "I am far from a very young man."

"Indeed! You have reached an advanced age, have you, and kept it a profound secret?"

"I am — well, to all intents and purposes I may claim to — a third of a century." He wished he could truthfully claim half-a-dozen

years more ; and that he had gray hairs to bear him out in the claim ; but he could not.

“Thirty-three and a third years old ! Well, then you are just at the age to take a little motherly advice from me, in a filial manner” —

She was startled to find her hand suddenly unclasped, and looked to see whether it was only an exhibition of annoyance at her pretense of maternal interest. But no, he had caught sight of a sorrowful figure coming slowly toward them. It was Meg, who crept up in evident dejection, and nestled close to Anne’s other side.

Meg noticed that they stopped whatever they were talking about, and glanced hurriedly at their faces — only to see that they were both disconcerted at her arrival. She would have fled away again ; but her mother caught the glance, and its meaning, and clasped her daughter suddenly in her arms, and strained her to her bosom, as if she would squeeze out whatever unhappiness had found lodgment in her young heart.

Strafford looked on for some time in jealous admiration, and then dutifully, though reluctantly, announced that he would gather up the party for the homeward start.

“Now, my sweet one ; tell your mother what it is.”

“Oh, no, Mamma. It’s nothing.”

“That only means that you are not quite ready to tell me. But you will, before they come back, now, won’t you ? You won’t leave your only mamma in cruel suspense ?” (Silence.) “Come,

dear" (shaking her gently, as if to awaken her), "time flies, and I don't want to carry this pain in my heart all the afternoon and all the way home."

"Oh, Mamma! Must I? Well, then let me whisper it in your ear. *What's the matter with me?*"

"Matter with my precious girl? Are you ill? Tell me more! Quick — tell me!"

"No, Mamma, I'm very well, I suppose; but what do other people think of me?"

"They love you, darling, if they have sense enough. And if they have not, we don't care, do we?"

"No" (hesitating), "I suppose not. But suppose anybody — any boy for instance — *should* say that if he couldn't get anybody but Meg McVey he would go alone — and if another boy he said it to *should* laugh, and they *should* go off together and leave me alone — what would they mean? Why would they do so?" She buried her face in her hands, awaiting the answer.

"Why — why — oh, my best and dearest and loveliest of daughters! It would only mean that they are low boors, not worthy to breathe the same air with you! The brutes! The swine! Oh, it makes me sick!" And she really grew dizzy and half blind in the sympathetic anguish of her soul. "My baby — my pretty one!"

"But am I pretty? Even the least little bit? I don't mean beautiful like you — but at all like other girls? Half, or a quarter, as pretty as Mattie Klatty for instance."

Every word was like a sharp, jagged dagger to the doting mother, and she could no more have answered truthfully than she could have struck her child in the face.

"A thousand times prettier than a thousand Mattie Klattys! Pretty!" and she kissed the red hair, too thick and growing too far down for the fashion of those days. "Pretty!" and she kissed the brows, too heavy and too strongly marked; and the eyes, too full and too far apart. "Pretty!" and she kissed the cheekbones, too high and covered with freckles, and the mouth, too large and hearty. "Pretty!" and she kissed the firm jaw, too long and strong.

"Oh, yes, Mamma! I *know* I am pretty to you!"

"Well, is not that all we want — to be pretty to each other?"

"Yes," answered the gentle child, but with a gentle sigh.

"And when you grow to be a woman, won't we have good times together?"

"Yes, I hope so." (Sigh.)

"You a young woman and I an old one — *will* we be all in all to each other, or not?"

"Yes, I hope so!" and if there was any sigh this time it was smothered in loving kisses.

"No one shall ever come between us!" Here Anne caught sight of her bandaged wrist, and dragged off the two handkerchiefs; folding up the doctor's and calling to him as he approached, in a breezy, business-like voice, very different from

her tones during the later part of their *tête-à-tête*:—

“Oh, Dr. Strafford! Your handkerchief! Yes; my wrist is quite well, thank you. Ready to wield the book-keeping pen to-morrow as usual.”

She and Meg walked home with arms around each other's waists, and in loving talk. Meg was quite herself again, and even bestowed a deprecatory smile on the brute who had insulted her; a smile that seemed to say, “I forgive you, because I know how plain I am.” To which he replied with an unfeeling grin.

Anne bade Strafford good-night at her own gate. Said she:—

“Delightful time—and no harm done, after all.”

As he drove home he kept asking himself:—

“What did she mean by that? Did it signify that harm would have been done if I had asked for her heart and hand? That *that* would have spoiled all? Or only that another time would do as well?”

Sometimes it was the one and sometimes the other in his questioning soul. But he lay long awake that night, in a state far from ease and confidence.

CHAPTER VI.

TRANSIT AND LEVEL, CHAIN AND STAKES.

POOR Strafford strove in vain to bring matters again to the point they had reached when his queen sat on her log throne in the woods. Every effort to get up another picnic was quietly and easily baffled. A thousand little schemes to have a private talk with Anne were shriveled to ashes by her masterful management. Sometimes in giving them their *quietus* she would look him full in the eyes and shake her head with a quizzical smile that said plainly, "Young friend, I see through your plans and I will none of them."

Phil had already got all the learning the Springville public school could give him, and what little other cultivation he could be compelled to submit to by his busy mother in her free evenings. So he took hold of more advanced studies under the surgeon's guidance, and absorbed the rudiments of science with a rapidity that surprised his tutor. And now the time seemed near at hand when scientific attainments might be put to practical use.

"Mrs. McVey, would it be against your principles to talk of some very practical matters on a

Sunday? Say a sweet, quiet Sunday afternoon like this?"

"Not in the least. I and my children choose not to offend the feelings of our neighbors; barring *that* we always think 'The better the day, the better the deed,' and do as we like." Then she added hastily, "Of course you mean us all to join. Otherwise" —

"Oh, certainly! There are no secrets among us. So I'll open my budget. Do you know what the natives call 'the wind-work' of a railroad?"

"I ought to," she laughingly answered. "That wind has been blowing in my ears for weeks, as well as in everybody's else."

"It is all talked over at the store, I suppose."

"Oh, yes; sometimes bothering me so that I wish railroads had never been invented! Talk, talk, talk about funds, about legislation, about right of way, about route, about management — until the long columns of figures which I am trying in vain to foot up correctly seem to me to be stretches of unfinished track!"

"Well, I am sorry you are annoyed, but glad the talk goes on, because it will result in work."

"Well, why don't they stop talking and go to work? Does it help theirs to hinder mine?"

"Not directly. But, you see, over the prairie one route is about as cheap as another — all absurdly cheap¹ — so we talk about several, and

¹ On many a stretch of dry prairie, all the grading and ditching has been done and the line prepared for the ties and rails, for less than five hundred dollars a mile.

accept the one where the villages, and townships, and citizens will give us most land and most money."

"Oh, I see! Put yourselves up at auction, as it were."

"Not exactly; only *you* give *us* so-and-so, and *we* will give *you* so-and-so. It is a matter of competition — combination — making one hand wash the other — 'log-rolling,' as the expressive phrase is; you help me roll my logs and I'll help you roll yours."

"Well, I have n't any logs to roll."

"How about Phil?"

"Philip, my son, are you a log?"

"Sometimes I think so when I tackle some of the problems in the doctor's books."

"Phil is no log; but he must be rolled into some fine place in the world. Or rather, he must roll himself, as he is well able to do. Now, the railroad is the best available rolling track."

"A little boy like him?"

"Mother! I'm not a little boy! I can lift you! Just let me show you!"

"No, thank you; not just now. I am high enough for the present. But I'd like to know how Phil can have anything to do on a great, coarse, heavy railroad?"

"Do you know what is the first step in railroad building after the wind-work?"

"No. But I shall in a few minutes. I see you are going to tell me — and I shall be glad to learn."

"Well; after the wind-work comes the field-

work, and then the earth-work. Field-work is surveying."

"I know surveying!" cried the boy.

The doctor laughed, and replied:—

"You know the A B C of it, and the rest will follow with practice. Now, the route for our road is practically decided on; and the next thing will be to start out over it with transit and level, chain and stakes. It takes educated men for transit and level; but intelligent laborers can run the flags, chain, and stakes."

"Then where does the small boy come in?"

"Oh, wait and you'll see. The surveyors indicate the line and the chain-men follow it. Each stake marks a step of progress; and when it is set firmly in the ground the head chain-man walks forward until the man holding the rear end of the chain reaches that stake. He holds his end of the chain at the stake and calls 'Stick,' and then the head-man sets another stake and shouts 'Stuck,' and then they go on for another chain-length, mile after mile, and day after day."

"Stick! Stuck! Stick! Stuck! It sounds like the ticking of a tall clock."

"So it does; a timepiece marking paces in the march of civilization."

"Very fine! I think you could extract sunshine from cucumbers!"

"Well, now; just think of the feelings of a tired and lonesome farmer, miles and miles away from everything, when he sees a line of our white stakes stretching across his dull, flat fields!"

"I suppose it seems to him as if the great world were coming to visit him."

"Yes; and he is right. It is a good deal to have mankind passing by in plain sight, even if it does n't 'light and say howdy!'"

"So he welcomes you with open arms, does he?"

"Ye-es — on one condition, and that is that we run across his land 'square with the world;' that is to say, north and south or east and west."

"What earthly difference can it make to him which way trains are to run?"

"Why, you know his farm is bounded by government surveys, which are all 'square with the world.' So when he plows a field his furrows all run parallel with his fences and with each other. Now, suppose the railroad runs diagonally across a field, 'cater-cornering,' as he says; lo! his fine, straight-sided, rectangular field is made into two three-cornered patches — his abomination. He can never plow that whole piece in long parallel furrows again. There must always be a 'nubbin' of ground in one corner or in the middle, where short furrows come together and plague him."

"Then how do you manage? Run where you don't want to, or just skip his farm and go on beyond?"

"No; we face the music. Meet smiles and free land while we run 'square,' and frowns and damage-suits where we 'cater-corner.' That's all."

Phil had been visibly chafing under these generalities, and now his mother took pity on him.

"You can hardly hold in, can you, Phil?"

"Oh! I was n't thinking about that — or — yes I was, too. Where does the boy come in, all this time?"

"Oh! the boy is here and there and everywhere; usually with the transit or the level, but often running back to halt or hurry the men or change their orders. Then he keeps the cash account — expenses and all that — and, like Judas, he carries the bag and pays the bills; and before he gets back he is a pretty good leveler and surveyor, also cashier and accountant."

"How long would the trip be, Doctor — and how much cash would it involve?"

"Oh, the trip I propose to make would take some three weeks or a month, and say a dollar a day for a half-hand like Philip."

"Would that cover everything — expenses and all?"

"Everything."

"Well, thirty dollars is a good deal of money; but I think I should not hesitate where my boy's education is concerned. It has not cost me much so far." And she caressed his rough head with love and pride.

"What do I understand you to say, Mrs. McVey?"

"That I will gladly pay thirty dollars, or whatever the trip costs, if you will kindly take him along."

"Oh — ho-ho-ho! Excuse my smiling. What kind of heathens do you take us for? Use your

son and your money too! Well—on some other planet, perhaps; but not on this little globe. What I meant was that Phil's wages would be a dollar a day, and all expenses paid."

Thereupon Phil arose, put his hand on the floor, turned a "hand-spring," and alighted almost noiselessly on his feet. Said he:

"I beg pardon, ladies and gentleman; nothing short of that could express my feelings."

Before many months, behold the learned doctor at the head of a surveying party whereof Phil is a humble — no, a junior — member: his first separation from home!

All day they were running "tangents" and turning curves and taking levels; and in the evenings there were field-books to be studied and figured up — so many yards of cutting and filling, so wide at top and bottom; and *such and such* borrow-pits for the filling and spoil-banks for the cutting, in places where the earth from the cuttings could not be used profitably for the fillings. It was hard work, bodily and mentally, but profitable and satisfactory.

It may be asked how Dr. Strafford could leave not only his practice, but also his fair enslaver. The fact is the latter had grown a little impatient at his persistency, and had indicated, in some tactful and womanly way, that she desired it to come to a stop; and thereupon Strafford had decided that a little absence would be wholesome.

"Phil, run over to that house and see if it's the widow Tansey's, and ask if this fence is her west line — I think it must be by the general sketch we are running by."

"All right. And, Doctor, the sun is getting low, how about seeing if they can accommodate us to-night?"

"Sundown? Mercy! So it is! I thought it was about four o'clock!"

"Four!" cried one of the tired and free-spoken chain-men, "I 'llaowed it was nearer forty!"

"Ya-as," said another, "my innards has been hollerin' 'cupboard! cupboard!' fer the last mile, every step!"

"All right, Phil. Hunt us a cupboard and a lodging, same time. Work ahead to the section line, men, and we'll follow Phil shortly."

As Phil approached the farmhouse by a convenient road, the first living object he saw was a strapping girl of considerably above his own age, — almost a woman, in fact, — standing on the top rail of a fence, gazing from under her stretched palm at the distant group of surveyors. The gleam of the declining sun prevented her seeing Phil's approach, and she was startled by his voice and leaped down from her high perch in a rather undignified manner; whether merely scared off her balance, or in haste to hide a rather bountiful display of sunbrowned and soil-browned bare feet and legs, he did not know.

"Does the widow Tansey live here?"

She giggled so excessively that she could hardly

speaking, but managed to let him know that the widow Tansey did abide in that farmstead.

"Do you know if that fence that our party is working toward is the boundary of her farm."

"Oh, massy, haow sh'd I know? I jes' work in th' haouse: I don't never work aout in th' fields." (Offended pride.)

"Oh, you live there too, do you?" said he, as they started together toward the house.

There was something so embarrassingly personal, and at the same time so amusing, in this question that she was impelled to a fresh burst of laughter, while she could only peep at him through the fingers of the red hands with which she hid her blushing face.

"Well, do you think that you and the widow Tansey together could give us eight men a bite to eat and a place to sleep to-night?"

"Eight men? Oh, you mean *seven* men and *yew!*" And at this bit of pleasant banter she laughed harder than ever.

Phil was nettled at the distinction between him and the *men*, and retorted:—

"Never mind: I'll forgive you, considering where it came from, as the man said when the mule kicked him. But you have n't told me yet about supper and beds."

"Oh, well; I 'xpect the' 's feed enough abaout th' place."

"Good enough, Miss — Miss — what did you say your name was?"

"I dunno's I said!"

"Oh, well — it does n't matter. But I should think you would n't mind telling a *boy* like me! I'll never tell!"

"Well, seein' ye 're sech a leetle boy — sech a dear, pootty leetle boy — ye may call me Dolly ef yer a min' ter. My name 's Dorothea, but folks most gen'ly calls me Dolly, for shortness."

"Well, then, Dollyforshortness, I'll call you Dollyforshortness, too. Now, Dollyforshortness, if you think I'm such a little boy, just wait and watch me eat."

"I'll warrant ye! Eat so much it makes ye thin t' carry it raound, I 'xpect."

When they reached the house the widow Tansy was nowhere to be seen.

"I reckon she 's aout a-milkin', 'n' madder 'n' a wet hen 'cause I worn't on hand t' help."

This consideration was, like all others, wonderfully amusing to Dolly, but she suddenly checked herself to say: —

"Tell ye what! I'll put the stuff fer ye on a-cookin' 'n' then she *can't* say no!"

"Oh, no. I'd rather ask her."

"Oh, no danger of her a-sayin' no, anyhaow. But I'll start in a-mixin' s'm bread, fust goin' off!" And she banged down the bread-tray, banged open the flour-barrel, banged out a scoopful into the tray, and began wetting it up before Phil could make up his mind what to do. He soon resolved to go in search of the mistress of the house, but before he got clear of the door Dolly called out: —

“Ye mought fetch in a bunch o’ chips and start the fire up, leetle boy! *Pootty leetle boy!*” (This in a tone of mocking superiority.)

Phil hesitated, but being accustomed to obey feminine commands he hastened to bring in the wood, and built the embers on the hearth into a merry blaze. Then when he got up from his knees to put his former plan into execution, behold Dolly had donned her shoes and stockings (evidently without any preliminary ceremony), and was standing by the door, floury hands outstretched, with the unmistakable intention of having a good-natured tussle with him as he passed. But he turned and fled through the front door and round the house, sending back a mocking laugh and all the infinitude of contemptuous defiance which, for some inexplicable reason, is expressed by placing the thumb at the point of the nose and waving the fingers at the adversary.

Phil found the old woman milking, and she held the necessary colloquy without an unnecessary cessation from her task.

“Feed eight on ye? Why, sartain ef ye kin putt up fer wunst with common fixin’s sech’s we plain kentry folks live ontew all the time.”

“Well,” said Phil, anxious to save Dolly from being blamed for her zeal, “I saw a young woman in the house — shall I tell her what you say?”

“Oh, Dolly! No; she ain’t no airthly ’ccaount. She’d orter ’a’ be’n aout h’yer a-milkin’ an haour sence. I’ll be in presently ’n’ fix things up.”

"All right," said Phil, skipping away, "I'll tell her you will come in and do it yourself."

He found that Dolly was not bearing malice — quite the contrary; but he was now at his ease, protected by the presence of Strafford and the others, who had arrived. When the widow came in she greeted them pleasantly, and directed them to the well "to clean up," and said to Dolly, in a fat, good-humored drawl: —

"Why, Dolly; ye got things started? Dew tell! I want ter know! Ye got more sense th'n I thort ye hed. Wal, I 'xpeck it's jest 'cause a young feller showed up, 'n' the' wuz more a-comin'," and she laughed a fat laugh of entire complacency at Dolly's sudden and unaccustomed efficiency.

A lot of fried pork, sizzling from the pan, hot biscuits, green tea, unlimited milk warm from nature's fount, butter, honey, pickles, stewed wild grapes, and apple sauce, all made a supper fit for the gods, and it was met with Olympian appetites. Dolly waited on the others when called upon, but her "pootty leetle boy" did n't have a chance to call for anything. His cup and platter were kept full to overflowing, and, in spite of his protests, were as crowded when he had done as when he began.

"Told ye ye could n't eat as much as a *ma-an*," she whispered, tauntingly, pointing at his plate, as he left it.

When Phil and the doctor walked out into the starlight, the latter said: —

"You seem to have made a conquest, Phil."

Phil looked sheepish and hung his head, cherishing a bitter anger at poor Dolly.

"She must be a perfect fool!" he answered.

"I suppose so. Handsome, too, in her way, is n't she?"

"No!" said the boy, indignantly. He was still in the youthful stage of life when the saying, "Handsome is as handsome does," was truth to him. This tomboy did not "do handsome," and she did not look like his mother or Meg, so she was anything but comely. When he saw her after her work was done, standing silent and lonesome in the shadow of the well-curb, he walked away quickly to the other side of the house. He would as soon have thought of flirting with the old widow. But when he saw one of the chainmen stroll out in that direction, and noticed that the girl instantly came back to the house, he partly forgave her for her objectionable bearing toward himself, and heard with pleasure the mocking laughter of the fellow's companions at his discomfiture.

Phil and the doctor "put in" an hour or so of work over the field-books, until the tired boy found himself almost asleep all the time, and quite asleep occasionally. Then the doctor made him go to bed, and did not waken him in the morning until the rest were sitting down to breakfast. While Phil was eating, Dolly found a chance to say:—

"Say, bub; can't ye come back h'yer ag'in t'-night?"

"No, indeed; not unless it rains like sixty, so we can't work."

"I wish 't would rain."

"It don't look like it," he replied, laughing, and glancing at the huge arch of cloudless sky — larger over the prairies than anywhere else except over the sea or over the desert.

"Whar 'll ye be come night?"

"Not far from Danfield; just this side of the river, if we have luck, and don't come to a mountain or something beforehand."

"Wal," with a sigh, "the' ain't no maountin. I wish 't the' wuz one, a big one, right h'yer."

"Well, there is n't any, so good-by!"

"Oh, see h'yer; what's yer hurry?"

"Why, the rest are all gone, and I've got to settle with the old woman and go too."

"Oh, dear! Hev ye? Wal, I 'll jest run daown t' th' fence whar I fust seed ye, 'n' wait fer ye."

"Don't you do it."

"Yes, I 'm a-goin' ter!" and off she flew.

"Well, Mrs. Tansey, you have entertained us beautifully. Now, I am like Judas, I carry the bag, so I will pay our score, if you please; how much is it?"

"Oh, I did n't 'llaow t' charge ye nothin'. 'T ain't aour way h'yerabaouts t' take folks' money th't stops with us fer a meal o' vittles er a night's lodgin'."

"Well, that's all right for just common way-farers, but you see here are eight of us, and the railroad company hires us, and pays our expenses."

"'T would n't cost ye a cent, hey?"

"Not a cent. You see I'll just put it down in my little book, and get it all back from the company with the rest."

"Wal, then — would a dollar be aout o' th' way? I don't want to be noways onreasonable" —

"No, a dollar would be very moderate, I should say; if it were n't that I am handling the company's money, I should say that a dollar was too little. But if you are content, I am, and the company ought to be."

"Wal, then, we're all suited," and the good soul laughed as she took the money.

"Oh, I say, Mrs. Tansey: I'd like to leave a quarter with you for Dolly — I don't see her anywhere around," and he made a pretense of looking for her.

"Wal, as yew say, if it war n't somebody else th't wuz t' git the money, I'd say a quarter wuz tew much; but if yew say so, I'll give it tew her."

Phil, on joining his companions, avoided Dolly's fence corner by a wide *détour*, and that impulsive young woman was fain to get back to the house, swallowing her mortification as best she could. When Mrs. Tansey gave her the quarter, she threw it angrily on the ground, but thought better of it, picked it up again, and guarded it lovingly. Then when she spent it for a little bit of finery, she never put on the adornment without a regretful thought of the "pootty leetle boy," whose very name she had forgotten to ask.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN THAT WANTED HIS RIGHTS.

ON the following day they had to suspend field operations while working out a problem to decide which of two routes to use in getting the road down from the general prairie level to the second bottom" of Spring River, whereon the town of Danfield stands. They stopped at a cross-roads store a few miles from town, kept by one Sanders. There Strafford and Phil had to make a labyrinth of pencil calculations, occupying most of one night and so much of the next day that it was too late, when they came to a decision, to make it worth while to start out on the line. So they had an afternoon of welcome rest and some observation of local peculiarities.

Jim Sanders was one of the characters common in the West as keepers of country stores. Shrewd, bright, kind-hearted, possessed of an inexhaustible fund of good-humored wit, he was able to trade closely and sharply, refuse credit with jocular firmness, and ridicule unsparingly all the customary follies inseparable from ignorance and isolation — laziness, superstition, bigotry, and, above all, quarrelsomeness, — and yet remain the guide, philosopher, and friend of all the country around.

Phil, being a boy, could observe and study everything without giving offense. Strafford, experienced man of the world, saw everything, but took care not to appear to be "a-makin' a show of us galoots, 'n' a-passin' his remarks 's though we wuz n't jest 's good 's him, any day!"

Jim Sanders seemed to know everybody in the great and growing county of Spring, except little toddlers visiting his store for the first time since they saw the light of day a very few months before.

"Why, hel — lo Smith! An' h'yer's Mis. Smith! Haowdy, haowdy! Wait till I set a cheer fer ye t' light down by. Thar, bub, I guess ye'm big enough t' climb aout over th' tailboard. H'yer, sis, lemme jest set ye onto the store steps. Thar! Doantee cry! See, mommy's a-comin'! Naow, Mis. Smith, han' me daown th' baby — thar; one, two, three — all of tew sence ye wuz h'yer last! Sakes alive! Ye be a-doin' yer dooty by yer country, *noble!* Seem's though it worn't but abaout day-before-yesterday-week-after-next that ye got marr'd! Smith, ye know yer way raound to th' hoss-shed, I reckon. Wal, wal; I 'most wish 't I hed sore eyes, th' sight on ye 'd be so good for 'em!"

After supper the talk turned upon politics, and when discussion rose above moderation, Jim broke in:—

"See h'yer, yew fellers! Why don't ye quit yer quarr'lin' 'n' go t' fightin'? By the great horn spoon, the' 's be'n more foolishness talked in

this h'yer store t'night than would keep a loonatic asylum a-goin' fer a month! It didn't take nary a one on ye a minute t' tell all ye knowed; 'n' all th' rest o' th' time ye've be'n a-hollerin' aout what ye don't know! I ollers notice th't th' less a man knows th' laouder he hollers — jest as it's sure t' be th' loose spoke in th' wheel th't dooz th' squeakin'."

Next day they ran their line near the top of the hill and returned again to Sanders' store for the night. A curious and deeply interested bevy of neighbors gathered about them and their paraphernalia as they rested on the store porch in the cool of the day. Much gossip came out as to the farms to be cut through and the farmers to be benefited or harmed by the line adopted.

"Lucky fer yew, stränger, th't B'-God Hobbs worn't to hum when ye druv yer stakes acrost his medder."

"Why, where's Hobbs?"

"Wal, he's t' Danfield t'-day a-tryin' one lawsuit; 'n' ef he'd a b'en to hum when ye tackled his medder, mebbe he'd 'a' b'en thar ag'in t'-morrer a-tryin' another, 'n' yew the plaintiff. Or the people of the State of Ellenoy, mebbe, ef he'd 'a' hed his gun. Ye see Burr Hobbs is one o' the kind o' men folks round here call a 'B'-God kind of a man.'"

"What kind of a man is that?"

"Wal, I'll tell ye. Burr can't never see but one side of anythin'; and the side he sees is *his*

side. He wants his rights, an' then if there's anythin' left over, other folks can have theirs. Quarrels with everybody — farm mortgaged clear from the front gate out to the back fence all the time to keep his lawsuits a-goin'. Like enough to be foreclosed next term of court. Married a poor widder-woman — Widder Dutcher — with a daughter, and then made the house so hot for 'em that the daughter hed to leave — she's a-working for the Widder Tansey t'day."

"But how about his nickname?"

"Oh, you jest hear him talk when ye see him — you'll find how it comes. Ye see, Burr's medder is jest whar ye begun a-cater-cornerin'."

"Oh, he owns the brow of the hill, does he? Well, I guess I know his house; I'll step over and see him."

"Better wait till t'-morrer, 'n' let him cool off a bit."

But Strafford paid no heed to this counsel, nor would he let Phil go with him. On the road he met a man whose long, quick, angry strides suggested that he might be the person who felt himself aggrieved by having his farm "cater-cornered," but both kept on their way. On reaching the farmhouse he was met by a woman whose pale, anxious face, and round, hollow eyes looked as if she might be the wife of a passionate man, prone to bring trouble upon himself and others. She said: —

"I guess yew 'm the railroad man I see this arternoon in aour medder."

"Yes, I had to go through your meadow this afternoon."

"Wal, Hobbs he 'll be back shortly, 'n' I guess I would n't wait ef I wuz yew. I guess it 'll be all right ef ye don't wait — jest go on abaout yer business. He's stepped over t' see ye naow, 'n' I don't doubt but what he 'll be aout t' settle it t'-morrer — when ye have yer party with ye."

"Well, madam, I should like to oblige you, and I would go away; only I understand Mr. Hobbs has some grievance against me, — or thinks he has."

"Wal, I 'xpect 'most any man 'd think he hed a grievance ef ye wuz t' go a-cater-cornerin' up his farm!"

"The railroad can't touch his farm until it has paid for all the damage it can do."

"Pay! Ye can't pay a man fer a-havin' t' plaow a cater-cornered field all his life; 'n' them as comes arter him, tew!"

"Can't pay him enough? But suppose the jury gives him the whole value of the field!"

"That don't make no difference — he's got t' dew the plaowin'. But h'yer he comes; ye kin do 's ye're a min' ter!" And she went in, shut the door, and peeped trembling through the window.

"Mr. Hobbs, I suppose!"

"That's m' name! Who might yew be?"

"Strafford is my name. I have charge of the surveying party that ran a line through your meadow to-day."

"Ye be, be ye? Well, wha' 'd ye dew it fer?"

Strafford sat down on the door-stone and rested his elbows on his knees as if for a long talk. He was quite cool, being fortified by two considerations; in the first place he knew that Hobbs could not strike a stranger sitting peacefully on Hobbs' own doorstep; and in the second place, he felt sure that if the worst came to the worst, he could "handle" Hobbs. The strong, awkward, angry, unpracticed farmer would be no match for the younger and slighter athlete, to whom "the gloves" had been a favorite part of the outfit of the gymnasium.

"If he gets a grip on me it will go hard — but I'll get my back to the moonlight, and he'll go to grass a good many times before he catches any hold that will stay with him. I only hope I sha'n't have to hurt him too much." Then aloud: —

"What did I do it for? Well, personally, I did it for about three dollars a day. That is what they pay me."

"Three dollars!" snarled the other. "Thet ain't no pay fer trespassin' ontew another man's rights!"

"So I tell the company, but they don't seem willing to give any more."

"Yew jest give 'em my compliments, 'n' tell 'em they better give ye three hundred dollars a day afore ye come a-cater-cornerin' up my farm!"

"Oh, I couldn't tell them that, because it would n't be true."

"An' yew 've got the brass t' set thar on my door-stun 'n' tell me that t' my face?"

"Oh, plenty of brass for a little thing like that! You see, friend Hobbs, I try to do my duty; same as you try to do yours, I suppose; and my duty is to run a railroad line from Springville to Danfield, the best way I know how."

"Ye run squar' with th' world ontel ye struck my land!"

"I ran square with the world until I struck Spring River hollow; and then I found that Spring River did n't run square with the world. She just pays no attention to section lines whatever."

"That ain't no fault o' mine."

"Nor mine. The road has got to get down the hill somehow."

"It hain't got t' git daown no hill b'longin' t' me, I give ye notice!"

"I thought folks wanted to have the road built."

"Wal, d' ye know what thought did? Thought lied. I'm willin' t' have the road run acrost me same as it's done with th' rest — squar' with th' world — an' no other way."

"The curve has got to be on somebody's land."

"Sposen' it hez! Wha' 'd the' wanter pitch onter *me* for? Worn't the' nobody else the' could cater-corner on only *me*? What wuz ye thinkin' abaout?"

"I did n't think anything about it. If I had

I should have thought you 'd just as lief have some of the company's money as not."

"Wal, thar! Thought lied ag'in. Money wun't pay a man fer cater-cornerin' up his farm."

"Not if the money's up to the whole value of the field?"

"No sirree! Don't make a mite of odds. A man's got t' plow swearin' all his life."

"But he can afford to, if the road gives him in damages all the field is worth. He can afford to let the land lie idle after he's been paid for it."

"Let sech a piece o' land's that medder lay idle? Not while I'm above-ground, I wun't!"

"Oh, well — that is n't reason! Got to plow your land even after you've been paid for it, and got to swear when you plow it, because it is more trouble than it is worth." And he rose to depart.

"I did n't say it wuz reason. I said it wuz fact, 'n' I'll stan' tew it! What's mine's my own! Let them keep offen my land 'n' I'll keep offen theirs!"

Here followed one of the outbursts that earned poor Hobbs his name, "a B'-God sort of a man." The stars show the expletives; but no printed words can give an idea of the wild eyes, and the high-pitched, far-reaching falsetto that made the savage into the image of a crazed Malay, ready to "run amuck" and spread sorrow around: —

"** I'm a man, I am! I cal'late ** to act square, 'n' do my dooty, 'n' ** when I've done it, 'n' git kicked ** without any fault of mine, 'n' **

imposed upon like this; then ** somebody else is a-goin' t' git hurt, ** no matter who it is **."

Strafford had seen insanity in all its phases, and he merely studied this as one more added to the monstrous list. He knew the uselessness of argument; so he merely paused a while, and then replied quietly:—

"Good-night, Mr. Hobbs. Think over it. The road can't touch your land till it has paid for it."

"Thankee fer noth'n', 'n' think over noth'n'! I've said my say." He went in and banged the door.

Strafford soon overtook Phil, who had been watching the scene from a shadowy fence corner.

"You took it pretty cool."

"Yes; that is what I am for — to take things coolly."

"What 'll you do in the morning?"

"Go on with the work."

"Suppose he shows fight."

"Well — we won't cross Spring River till we come to it."

Phil would have liked to tell the doctor what he thought of his courage and coolness; but "men" don't tell each other what they think of each other, in the West.

They got at work at the usual time in the morning, and as soon as Hobbs had finished his chores he, too, sallied forth, axe and spade in hand.

"Say, Doctor," cried Phil, he's coming!"

"Let him come."

"Hurrah! See what he's doing? He is stopping to dig out all our stakes!"

"Ha-ha! He thinks that when he digs up our stakes he undoes our work! Natural enough to think so; but just let us get out to that fence, and one stake beyond to give our next back-sight, and we don't care what he does!"

"That's so! He keeps looking up expecting us to come and defend our stakes!"

"All right! Twenty minutes more will let us out. Pitch in, boys! Work fast, but keep your curve right, for the Lord's sake!"

"He is clapping his hands and looking over our way! Oh, I see — he is setting a dog on us!"

"H'm-m. That's bad. I don't want to kill his dog, and I can't let his dog kill us."

"He's coming, lickity-split! A big bull-dog, too! I wonder if *I* can't take care of *him*!"

"Come back, Phil! Come back, I tell you! Don't you touch that dog!"

"No, no! *You* keep back and see me manage him. Don't come with me or you'll spoil my fun." And Phil was off like a shot to meet the enemy. When the biped and the quadruped approached each other the former called cheerfully, "Hi, old boy!" with some of the inarticulate clucks that dogs and horses understand. The dog slackened his pace and came on doubtfully. Phil stopped and repeated his friendly greeting, and as he did so he could see the fierce bristles erected on the dog's back and hips begin to lie

down in a peaceful manner. Then the boy squatted low and extended his hand, and the poor deceived brute came cautiously up and sniffed at it. Instantly Phil saw a slight wag in the hitherto rigid tail, and knew that the victory was his; they were friends instead of foes thenceforth. He lay down and rolled on the ground, while his new playmate began gamboling around him, having evidently concluded that there had been some mistake in his master's orders or his own comprehension of them.

Strafford now came forward in haste and trepidation, and the dog resumed his ferocity, probably fancying that his business was to defend both masters, old and new, from this stranger; but Phil readily called him back.

The line-runners were steadily and rapidly nearing the fence, but Hobbs was much more rapidly pulling up the stakes and obliterating the line already laid. He soon arrived where Phil and his new friend were amicably playing, and calling the dog (which came up wagging his tail and anticipating a hearty welcome) he cursed him, and with savage kicks sent him yelping home. Phil wanted to follow and comfort the poor beast, but Hobbs told him, with a threatening oath, to let his dog alone.

As Phil walked silently along, watching the irate landowner in his work of destruction, Hobbs waved his hand backward and asked triumphantly:—

“Whar’s yer line naow?”

"All gone," said Phil, in affected regret.

Then when Hobbs arrived at where Strafford was at work, he cried : —

"Did n't I tell ye t' keep offen my land ?"

"You never said such a word to me."

"Wha — what ? Ain't yew th' man th't come t' my house last night ?"

"Yes."

"Wal — wha' 'd I tell ye ?"

"You asked me what I came for and I told you. Three dollars a day."

"Ya-as, 'n' I told ye th't no railroad could n't cross my land cater-cornerin', not while I live ; 'n' naow ye 're a-lettin' on ye did n't know what I meant !"

"Oh, yes ; I knew what you meant — that the road could n't build on any line I might lay the way I've laid it : and you knew what I meant — that I was only looking out for my three dollars a day."

"Wal, ye see naow what I meant. Whar 's yer line ?" and he waved his arm triumphantly backward.

"Why, it just looks as if we both had our own way. I earn my living, and you preserve your rights. Now, let's go on so for another five minutes and I'll shake your dust off my feet and call it square."

"Oh, yew 're smart ! Looks t' me 's though t' let ye stay h'yer a single minute under my eye and with my consent would be t' sanction yer hull perceedin'. No, sirree ! Not with my consent. I order ye all off."

"Well, we're going."

So he followed them up through the few remaining stations, "ordering them off" at every opportunity, and pulling up every stake as soon as they left it behind them.

After the line had passed the boundary, and the new direction had been noted beyond, Strafford came back and stretched his hand over the fence, saying: —

"Good day, friend Hobbs."

Hobbs approached grimly, hatchet in hand, from pulling the last stake: —

"I guess I'd orter cut it off," said he, and he raised the hatchet threateningly, but Strafford never flinched, and so the passionate fool grasped the outstretched palm and shook it warmly.

"Wal — ya-as — on the hull, I guess yew *be* the beater of all the fellers *I* ever come acrost!"

"Oh, you and I understand each other. We should never quarrel if we lived next-door neighbors for forty years."

"Dunno's we would!"

It was not until — all differences being settled — the road came to be actually built that Hobbs found out that, given the point where the road was to enter his land, and the degree of curvature, together with the point at which it left, and its subsequent curvature, the intermediate stakes could be set by any tyro — or it was even possible for experienced track-graders to lay out the road by the eye without any re-survey.

To anticipate a little, and dismiss from our

story for the present this troublesome character, we may say that the dispute between him and the road was settled only after a long and expensive quarrel. The company offered him fully half what the field was worth, which he indignantly declined, because, as he said: "It'll be wuth a dollar extry every time I break that field fer corn, or plow corn in it, or gether corn offen it, as long as I live." Then, as the statute provides, the company convened a jury of neighbors to assess damages, and the jury, disapproving Hobbs' course in this and other matters, assessed the damage at far less than what the company had offered—less in fact than the real damage—whereupon Hobbs, as the statute provides, appealed to the court, as we shall see hereafter.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOLLY AT THE STORE.

A DAY or two after Dolly received Phil's quarter-dollar she was accorded a half-holiday, and, full of radiant visions, donned her poor old best gown, wherein all tucks had been let out, alas! too long ago, took her shoes and stockings, — these she carried in her hand most of the way for the sake both of comfort and economy, — and hastened joyfully down to Jim Sanders' store. It was harvest season, and the store was empty of customers, and even of loungers. Jim saw Dolly afar off, and said to himself: —

“Hello! H'yer comes Widder Tansey's bound gal. Poor misfort'nit Dolly Dutcher. How she's growed! Pity her frock had n't growed too. She'd be pretty ef she was fixed up — yes, sirree! handsome as they make 'em! Poor thing; the widder did n't never give her a half a chance. Meant well by her, but did n't know no better, 'n' did n't think nothin' about it. Thar, she's stopped by the creek t' wash up 'n' put on her shoes 'n' stockings.” And he stepped inside so as not to embarrass her by staring at her approach.

“Why, Dolly — glad t' see ye. Ye're a great stranger. How's the widder?”

"Oh, she's — all right," said the girl, almost inaudibly, sitting down hastily and leaning forward so as to make her skirt come as far down in front as possible.

"Oats all cut?"

"Ya-as; aour land's all let out on the shares, ye know."

"Wal, what *is* the good news up your way, anyhow?"

"Oh, I dunno. What's fresh h'yeraways?"

She wished he would begin on the subject of the railroad party; but he branched off to local matters, not dreaming that Dolly knew or cared about anything else. At last she said, timidly:

"Th' railroad folks was up aour way t' other day."

"I wanter know! Why, so the' was!"

"Ya-as. Stayed all night."

"Why, so the' did h'yer one night; nice fellers, too."

"Ya-as," she drawled, hoping he would go on and particularize, but he did not.

"Whar be the' got tew by this time?"

"Oh, workin' daown th' hill close to Danfield. It's a big job t' lay out a road."

"Ya-as, a-peekin' threw th' instrument 'n' all."

"Oh, the' don't all hev t' peek threw th' instrument."

"No, I don't s'pose *all* on 'em would be tall enough — leastways 'thaout he stood on suth'n'."

"What, the boy? I warrant he could peek threw it equal to the best on 'em, tall or short."

Dolly's eyes glowed and her cheeks flushed at this, and she remained in happy silence for some moments. Then she resumed the subject.

"Is it fur from h'yer t' whar the' be?"

"Right smart. Between two 'n' three mile."

She went to the door and gazed wistfully in their direction.

"Be the' clust t' the road?"

"No; a quarter or more south. Did the' leave a-owin' on ye anythin'?"

"Oh, no; the' paid Miss Tansey, good." She gave up, with a sigh, the hope of ever seeing again her little idol, and turned to the bewildering array of goods displayed on the "dry goods side" of the store.

"Haow much is that thar blew shawl?"

"That's a dollar." ("Hello! they must 'a' give her some money.")

"Haow much fer that handkercher?"

"Fifteen cents for that." ("It ain't a dollar, evidently, 'n' it's more ner fifteen cents.")

"Haow much fer that shiny comb?"

"Oh, that's wuth fifty cents, but I'll let ye have it fer forty." ("No, it ain't fifty nor forty. Bet it's a quarter.")

"Haow much fer that stor hat?"

"Oh, that's three shillin', or say thirty cents, 'n' throw in a ribbon."

She looked wistfully at the hat, but passed on. ("Told ye it was a quarter.")

"Here's some nice gloves fer a quarter a pair."

Dolly's attention was at once arrested. "Can I try 'em on," she asked.

"Oh, yes, seein' it's you."

So she drew one on her long straight fingers and over the thumb-joint, broadened and strengthened by the habit of milking cows, — a fine hand, all but the color. These were only half length fingers, which was unfortunate in view of her protruding nails, long and oval, but uncared for.

Jim's heart softened toward the poor girl.

"Dolly, if ye'll take the gloves, I'll throw in the hat 'n' ribbon."

"No — will ye, though?" and she raised her eyes full of a bright smile to his face.

"Yes, I will, Dolly; I always liked ye; 'n' Mis. Tansey, she's bought right smart o' truck o' me, one kind with another."

Dolly had a good quarter-of-an-hour putting on her first new hat with hands bearing her first gloves. (Happily she did n't know that when she lifted both her arms both her rag garters became painfully visible.)

"Dolly, does Mis. Tansey let ye go t' school when it keeps?"

"Ya-as — she said I wuz t' go; but haow could I go — th' way I look!"

"Well, why did n't ye tell her so?"

"I did; 'n' then she upped 'n' give me one of her ol' frocks — a mild tew big."

"Worn't there enough o' the same t' make it smaller?"

"Enough o' the *same* t' make it smaller? He-he! Ya-as, I 'xpeck so. But what good 'd that dew me?"

“ Why, ye could cut it down.”

“ Cut it daown? I’d look nice a-stickin’ scissors intew a frock!” After a pause she added, “ ‘N’ then, I don’t ‘xpeck I lotted on goin’ t’ school so much as I wisht naow I had ‘a’ done.” And she thought of the smart, bright, clean, learned “leetle bo-oy” she had seen poring over the books and papers in the “settin’-room.”

“ Wal, Dolly, tell ye what! Git a holt o’ that frock ag’in ‘n’ send it t’ me by any team th’t ‘s a-comin’ by. My sister to Danfield, she ‘s a screamer t’ cut ‘n’ fit! She jest loves t’ dew it for nothin’ — jest fer th’ fun of it. ‘N’ I’ll take yer measure right now!”

So he took a string and measured round her waist and tied a knot.

“ Sho! Must ‘a’ made a mistake. That knot ‘s surely too near the end! Try again — thar — no, it’s jest right. Wal, ye’re as thin as a snipe, ain’t ye! Naow, raound under yer arms. Gee whillikins! That looks too big this time. No, it’s jest right. Wal — thar ‘s another knot. Naow th’ length — shoulder to ankle — my eyes — come pootty near usin’ up all the string in the store! Wal — ye’re set up ‘bout right fer a woman, a’ready. They say twice’t around the wrist is once’t around the neck, ‘n’ twice’t around the neck is once’t around the waist, ‘n’ twice’t around the waist is — I forget what that is — once’t around the third finger of yer left hand, or somethin’ like it!”

He chucked her under the chin and she laughed

innocently, without any idea of flirtation: for was n't he twice her age at least?

Fate, which had hitherto been very unfavorable to Dolly's sudden craze for the "pootty leetle bo-oy," now seemed to relent in her favor; for Phil, bent on some replenishment of supplies, entered the Sanders' emporium just as she was about leaving it for home.

"Why, hello, Dolly!" he called, not over cordially.

"Howdy," said she, in a modest simper. Then after he had bought what he wanted and was going away she added:—

"Whar be ye a-goin'?"

"Back to the job."

"My folks lives over that-a-way. Could I git t' walk with ye a leetle ways?"

"Yes; if you 'll behave yourself," he answered rather suspiciously, and walking on very fast.

"'Course I 'll behave!" she replied, exerting herself to keep pace with him. "I got this h'yer hat 'n' these h'yer gloves with that quarter ye left fer me."

"Did you? Well, they look first rate."

This was gratifying; but yet conversation flagged. She had to try again.

"What 's yer leetle name?"

"My little name is Bo-oy."

"Te-he! Then what 's yer big name?"

"My great name so far is Philip McVey; until I make a greater name; then it will be Philip McVey, Esquire, Railroad man."

This was almost too funny for human endurance; as were his further answers to questions as to residence and family connections. Her flattering interest in his every word had its softening effect on his obdurate heart, and he began to find the uncouth young semi-savage rather interesting. But she spoiled all by attempting to advance their intimacy. She could not resist the attraction of his boyish good looks, good clothes, good English, and cool disdain of her blandishments.

"Seems 's though ye wuz my leetle brother."

"Humph!"

"Ef ye wuz, ye 'd kiss me good-by when we git tew the fence yunder; naow would n't ye?"

"No, I would n't," he replied, adding to himself, "not unless you looked more decent."

"Haow could ye help yerself?" she asked, coming toward him.

"Easy enough!" and he quickened his pace gradually to a run, she following in great strides. If she had been barefoot, as usual, she might have caught him, so fleet of foot was she, and so slight an impediment were her short skirts and nothing else when at full speed. (She would have served, almost, as a model for Atalanta.) As it was, he soon found that she was no match for him, and then he began tantalizing her, pretending to be nearly caught and then darting away and laughing at her.

"Oh, dear!" she cried, in a half-womanly moan, as she stopped short, buried her face in the hollow of her arm and burst out crying.

"I told you you must behave yourself if you wanted to walk with me!"

"Oh, come back!"

"Good-by, Dolly!"

She picked up a stone and threw it at him, but he only laughed and went on the faster. A few years afterward, when he grew less unsophisticated, he often called himself a "blamed fool" for not stopping "just to see what she would do." But, boy as he was, he would not trust himself within the reach of those long, strong arms.

She stood watching him, until he was quite out of sight, and then turned toward the Burr Hobbs homestead, to have one of her rare interviews with her mother; but as she crept up she saw that the terrible step-father was at the barn, near by, and so she turned back without more than a passing glimpse of the suffering woman who would have so loved, yet feared, to have a few minutes with her exiled daughter — her one loved thing on earth!

"Yes! *He's thar!* Oh, Lord — why don't God *kill* such men?"

As she hurried back to the store on her way home she kept thinking of the wonderful "leetle bo-oy," and his "cute" and lovely ways and words and looks, especially his pretty contempt for poor Dolly. For many a day afterward her solace was to secrete herself in her great, ugly, bare, lonely attic (the widow Tansey was too stout to get up the rickety stairs without giving ample signs of her approach), and there put on

those black fingerless gloves, and cross her hands on her knees and gaze at them, flattering herself that they looked *almost* as clean and small as "his," "Philip McVey, Esquire, Railroad man."

Jim Sanders had been thinking a good deal about Dolly while she was away on her supposed visit to her mother, and he watched her return with a warm feeling in his big heart.

"Wal, Dolly! Did ye git t' see yer mammy?"

"No."

"Why not? What wuz th' matter?"

"Wal — I guess *yew* kin guess why not, 's well as I kin."

"He wuz 'raound, wuz he?"

Dolly nodded.

"Oh, Lord! The' hed n't oughter be no room on top o' th' graound fer sech a skeezicks as Burr Hobbs, s' long 's the' wuz room undergraound fer his wuthless carkiss! Ef he wuz mine, d' ye know what I'd dew with him? I'd trade him off fer a yaller dog, 'n' shoot th' dog!"

Dolly only sighed, and picked up her old hat, took off her new gloves and put them in it, and prepared to start for home.

"Don't ferget, Dolly, t' send me in that thar frock t' be made t' fit ye."

"No danger o' me fergettin' — ef ye raily mean it." And the poor girl looked incredulous that anybody should care to do anything for *her*.

"Dolly, ye shall have a frock t' go t' school in, or my name ain't Jim Sanders."

His name was Jim Sanders, and his intentions did not change, nor his attentions flag, until she had had two quarters' schooling, and her time was out with Mrs. Tansey, at which epoch, his name still continuing Jim Sanders, hers became Mrs. Jim Sanders: a marriage that seemed very happy — for a few years, and until no babies began to make their appearance. "One an' one 's pootty apt t' make two when the' don't make three. When the' git t' be three, the're all one ag'in."

She had been too long uncared for at the forming period of her life. She could not bear sudden prosperity untempered by womanly cares of family. She grew volatile, flighty, unreasonable in her treatment of poor Jim; and he was too peace-loving and easy-going to apply the wholesome restraint which might have put a stop to her defiant laughter — changed it into tears, perhaps — and quelled the Lower Animal which is always hidden somewhere below the surface of the Human.

CHAPTER IX.

HOME AGAIN, TRANSIT AND ALL.

PHIL and Strafford and the rest "footed it" back to Springville over the line they had run, correcting it here and there where looking at it in reverse seemed to throw a new light on its few engineering problems. In the main it was all right, and the road runs upon it to-day.

"Oh, isn't that pretty!" cried Phil, as they emerged from a clump of trees, and from the summit of a slight rise in grade looked over undulating fields into blue distance, a line of solid woods fading in perspective on the left to a vanishing point, and the spires of Springville gleaming in the far-away horizon.

"Yes," said Strafford, pausing from work and leaning on his transit; "I wonder how many eyes will enjoy it hereafter, sitting on the left-hand side of passenger coaches as they round this curve."

"Do you often think of that?"

"Once in a while we surveyors recollect that we are setting out landscapes and waterscapes for whole generations of travelers to enjoy after we're dead and buried and forgotten."

"Maybe soldiers going to war."

"And lovers impatient of the slow miles."

"Or wounded heroes coming home for glory."

"Or bridal couples on their honeymoon trips."

"Or convicts going to prison."

"Invalids traveling for health, or going back home to die."

"But principally farming emigrants hurrying west, and not caring a button for scenery."

"Yes, in our day; but after them what then?"

"Why — I don't know."

"What would you say to Europeans on their way to India, and Chinese on their way to the Atlantic?"

"What! over this little road?"

"The road is the usual size; it is only deficient in length, and it has room to grow that way."

"But the Rocky Mountains!"

"Oh, they'll be climbed or tunneled. There will be many a carload of tea, coffee, and spice rush east over where we are standing, I prophesy."

The boy was dumb in view of the vast thoughts this inspired — dreams which are already realized at this present writing, for the "little road" is a link in a great transcontinental chain.

The party entered Springville toward the close of a gloriously bright, cool day, wherein the prairie cloudlets had tempered the inclement fierceness of prairie sunshine, and the almost undying prairie breeze had been fanning the faces of the tramping toilers. Each carried his long-accustomed allotment of the impedimenta, the doctor's being his precious transit, and Phil's

his and the doctor's handbag, and also an axe which the boy had insisted on adding to his load, so that there should be no consideration shown him on account of his youth. (Undaunted by the slur cast upon him by a stranger passing by: "Hello, axe! whar be ye a-goin' with that boy?")

Their way led them past Anne's cottage, and Strafford, after directing the others where to deposit their burdens, stopped there with his young protégé.

Oh, what a reception did the bronzed and broadened boy receive from his mother. As he sat on her knees, trying in vain to keep part of his weight on his own feet, poor Meg could scarcely find an unoccupied part of him available to kiss and hug.

"Yes, yes, mother! There, there — to be sure I *am* your boy — and grown big and strong — and brown — no, not handsome — and been away a whole month — there, there, *there!*" And he disengaged himself with difficulty.

"Why, you insensate young clod," thought Strafford, as Phil stood free at last, under the admiring gaze of all three, mortified at being treated so before a *man*.

"Now *is n't* he handsome, Dr. Strafford?"

"Well, there was one young woman we met in our travels who seemed to think so. Eh, Phil?"

"What's that?" said Anne, the smile and color suddenly leaving her face.

"Oh, nothing," Strafford hastened to say,

startled by the change. "A kind of half-witted servant girl seemed determined to make herself more attentive to him than to any of the rest of us, at one farmhouse where we stayed. But to do Phil justice, I must say the attraction did not seem to be reciprocal."

"No, indeed," said the abashed boy. "I only wished she had a mother who would have boxed her ears well for her, and made her cry." He was about to recount his later interview with Dolly, but the memory of the poor, big, awkward thing, sobbing on her arm, suddenly arose, and he was touched by a certain pity which he had not felt at the time, and so kept silence.

Anne was somewhat reassured, but Meg did most of the talking on the home side, while the travelers sketched the incidents of their expedition.

"Now, Meg, run and get a good supper ready for the returned prodigies. Kill the fatted calf, — I mean open your last bottle of pickled peaches, — and let us eat, drink tea, and be merry."

"No, no," Mrs. McVey, said Strafford, rising hastily, "you don't know our appetites, and you don't seem to notice our personal appearance." He glanced down at his sun-faded suit and woolen shirt.

"Nonsense! Appearance? Honorable stains of an honorable campaign; and as for the appetites — run, Meg, the more they can eat, the more you must provide. Now, Doctor, I'll warrant she will set out enough for you both and all of us." She went up curiously to the instrument on its

tripod : "Enough for this silent surveyor, too, if it needs anything. Tell me about this." She put her hand on the cold brass where his face had so often rested, and he wished it had been resting there now.

"Well, I'll set it up out on the lawn, and give you your first lesson in surveying."

So said, so done. She was an apt scholar, and almost as soon as the instrument was adjusted, and he had turned it to two or three points, explaining angles and levels, she understood the A B C of "running a line."

"Well, I think I should like to be a surveyor, especially if I could be 'monarch of all I survey.'"

"You can, if you'll let me fix the point," and he placed himself in front of the object glass. "Now, your right there is none to dispute."

"Oh, hush!" she whispered, looking nervously around; but Phil was away looking up some of his neglected pets.

"No, I'll not hush. I've come back set upon the same life-hopes I had when I went away — more set than ever."

"Nonsense! you are Phil's elder brother — my oldest son."

"Well, then, Mamma" (she laughed a little), "I've found out a secret since I have been away from home and you. I am not your son — not in the least degree!"

"Changed in your cradle?"

"No; born when you were trotting about in very short skirts and very long pantalets, and

grown old since then a good deal faster than you have, in some ways. For instance, I never talk so foolishly as you are talking now."

"I think I must go and help Meg a little."

"If you do, I will depart and never darken your door again!" and his teeth closed with an audible snap.

She turned and pretended to be looking again through the glass, though her eyes were closed, and two shining drops were pushing their way under the lids and down the lashes.

"What do you wish?"

"I wish to marry you. But all that I ask now is a private talk."

"I shall have to distress — disappoint — perhaps offend you mortally."

"Well, shoot your arrow through my heart; I would rather die so than live this way."

"Suppose my words should cost me your friendship?"

"I half suspect what they must be, and if I am right I can brush them away so that they will never pain either you or me."

"You can *not*."

"Try me. When may I see you alone?"

"I will come home at five to-morrow afternoon, when there will be no one here till Meg comes — if you leave Phil busy at your office."

"Trust me for that."

"You are going to be very cruel to me."

"Cruel! I worship you — my queen! my life! my love forever!"

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When they went in, Anne said :—

“Phil, I think the transit is *very* trying to the eyes.”

“I should think so,” said Meg, looking in her mother’s face in astonishment.

“Great Jehoshaphat !” cried Phil, what a bad thing it must be to be so weak like a woman, instead of strong like a man !”

“It is, indeed,” said Anne, with a sigh.

It goes without saying that Strafford’s appetite fell far short of justifying the expectations which had been raised regarding it. Phil did his best, so that Meg’s magnificent provision was not quite in vain; but he and she were the only ones that seemed to have any heart in the business.

Next afternoon the doctor joined Anne on her way home, and they sauntered along together, neither saying much, and she so pale as to be almost wan, in apprehension of what was to follow. For the first time in her life her looks came near to justifying her assumption of belonging to the generation anterior to his.

When they reached the cottage she entered the lockless door, asking him to wait until she should bring out chairs.

“Sha’n’t I —” he began; but she cut him off.

“No, no! Do as I say.” And they sat together on the shady, quasi-public lawn. She placed herself with her back to the street, and left him to face the world. (Men have beards to hide the quivering of *their* lips.)

“Now, Dr. Strafford !”

"You are the only woman in the world I ever loved — the only woman I can ever love — and I ask you to be my wife."

"I cannot."

"Will you tell me why?"

"Not unless you force me to do so. Will you be so cruel?"

"Cruel — *to you?*" He sat some time in agonized silence. Nothing could hide the quivering of his lips and eyelids, and the sobbing breaks in his hard-drawn breath. At last he rose slowly, saying: —

"I cannot face the horror of this disappointment. But I can go away."

"Sit down, please. *Do*, Dr. Strafford — sit down for a little while. You drive me out of my self-control! I am almost tempted to cure your infatuation by telling you my reasons."

"There is only one reason which could be conclusive."

"And that is?"

"That you do not, and cannot, love me."

She preserved a puzzling silence and he continued: —

"I feel as if I had always known that it would come to this. You never gave me a shadow of encouragement."

"Thank you for doing me that justice."

"Not one shadow! And yet, while I was away I thought and dreamed myself into consideration of the reasonableness of my hopes. I am young, and strong, and well-to-do. You are

young, and prosperous, and lovely, and independent; but you are alone and hard-worked. Our thoughts, tastes, feelings, are alike. And you are the one woman in the world for me to marry."

"You are not the one man in the world whom I could possibly marry."

"Then there is another man?"

"Well — perhaps — if things were entirely and utterly different from what they are."

Strafford ran his thoughts rapidly over the small list of his and her Springville acquaintances, but turned from each without an instant's pause. Then he said: —

"You were born in Boston?"

"In Lowell."

"Ah, yes!" the poor fellow groaned, as if his last hope in life were slipping away.

"Don't you wish me to tell you why it is impossible for me to marry *him*?"

"Oh, if you wish."

"Well" (with a rather harsh laugh), "in the first place he does not wish to marry me; in the second place I don't wish to marry him, and in the third place he is unworthy — not half, nor a tenth part as worthy as you! Nor as lovable, if you must know it!"

He looked long and intently at her blushing face, until a little light seemed to break over his own.

"Oh, dear!" she thought to herself. "Why does n't that girl come? Or Phil — or somebody!" Then aloud: "Well?"

"Well; yes, *very* well!" he said in his natural, manly voice.

"You are satisfied?"

"Satisfied to follow a certain course."

"What is that?"

"To live it down."

"That's right," she replied, rather sadly. "Live down your foolish fancy; and marry some nice girl of suitable age — and *really* beautiful!"

"Not a bit of it! Live down *your* foolish fancy; a fancy that anything in *your* past shall ruin *our* future!"

"Alas! Have all my efforts been thrown away?" ("Oh, Meg — Phil — *do* come!")

"Utterly thrown away! Worse than wasted. I love you more than ever."

"You are incorrigible! Here, take my hand, and my promise never to marry anybody so long as we both shall live!"

He was about impulsively to grasp the proffered hand, but drew back.

"What! — Hear you promise not to do the very thing I want you to do? Never! But I would like to kiss your hand before you draw it back." He bent low over it and she pressed it to his lips. "I will modify your proposed agreement and join you in it."

"Aha! I fear I cannot consent to the one you will propose."

"Wait till you hear it. I propose that neither of us shall ever marry without the consent of the other."

"Oh, well! I think I can agree to that."

"Then we are engaged after all, after a fashion."

"No, no! Or yes; engaged not to marry."

"That's better than nothing."

"Well, now I let you off from your part of the engagement at once and forever."

"No, I won't be let off! But I let you off from your part at once and forever."

"What a funny engagement!"

"Rather! But now that we are engaged, must I go on calling you Mrs. McVey? Can't I just call you Anne? I *love* that name — the silent *e* seems to soften and intensify the liquid sound of the *n*! May I call you Anne?"

"No! At least not before the children."

"Well; you may call me George before all the world, if you like."

"Oh, I think *Doctor* is pet-name enough. I've got so used to it that I should hate to change! Oh, here comes Meg — at last!"

"Oh, Doctor! How do you do? Mother, how splendid you look! The sunset makes your cheeks as red as roses! And your eyes! One sun in the sky is shining into two in our doorway!"

"Nonsense, my child! Don't make a goose of your poor old mother!"

"But I was frightened about you. I called for you at Polander Brothers and they said you had gone home — they supposed you had a headache."

"Well, dear, I met the doctor and he prescribed for me."

"Oh, Doctor! Do prescribe for me — if it will make me look like that."

The doctor gravely took from his pocket a vial of sugar of milk and poured out a little in a paper, while Anne fled into the house.

"Will it make me as pretty as mamma, Doctor, if I take it?"

"As pretty as most mammas, Margaret."

"Well, that 'll be *something*, any way."

"Now, good afternoon, Meg."

"Why, of course you will stay to tea!"

"Well, no, I think not to-night," he replied, looking doubtfully toward the door where Anne had disappeared.

"Nonsense! Mother! Mother! Dr. Strafford says he is n't going to stay to tea!"

Anne came down to the door. What could she say but "Dr. Strafford, will you stay? *Please* stay to tea!"

"Certainly! I 'll stay anywhere, go anywhere, everywhere — all at once."

Then Phil came, and they had a meal so jolly that it might be called hilarious — if not uproarious. Anne had a great piece of news to impart — some old Wayback friends had called, and she had promised to make a trip to her old "stamping-ground." There was to be an election there, and conventions and speeches, and she had never seen anything of that kind, so it would be a gay visit. All except the leaving of her Blessings!

"Who is it you are going to see, mother?"

"Oh, the — Prouders."

Phil was on the alert at once, but asked no questions. The doctor was reminded of the incident of meeting Zury during the broken-leg episode and he recounted it, somewhat to Anne's embarrassment.

After tea they had sweet songs, and on the whole it was an evening long to be remembered.

But Anne had "horrors" that night. What had she done? Encouraged poor Strafford? She had tried not to do so. Had she tried, or not? What kind of woman was she? Oh, dear!

Anne soon made her proposed visit to her old home at Wayback, and during her absence Strafford gained a new appreciation of the possibilities of filial devotion. Meg (with Phil's help), beside her other duties and beside her school studies, kept all the accounts which were in Anne's care at "the store," the brother and sister spending hours of every day and evening intent on the task — really a great one, but necessarily appearing to their untaught eyes absolutely mountainous. Yet "for mother," what could daunt them?

It was his tantalizing privilege to witness another rapturous reunion when Anne got home from Wayback, and listen to the wondering questions whereby the elder book-keeper elicited from the younger the history of the amazing achievement. At its close there were a few words that puzzled him for a time.

"Now, Mother, I am a little bit smart, am I not?"

"Smart, my daughter? Indeed, I doubt if there is another girl of your age in the world who could have done it. And so good, and so dutiful, and so loving! Motherly pride and love aside, I never saw or heard of anything like it in my life!"

"Yes; I am a little smart; and" (archly) "I am *very* good! Those things ought to count for something, even if I'm not — that other!"

What other? And why should the mother again strain the daughter to her bosom and rock her to and fro, as if by passionate endeavor she would shut out from her child's heart some cruel pain?

The days that followed were enlivened with delightful accounts of her observations of political campaigning — all quite general and devoid of personal allusions to herself and other particular individuals. But it seemed to Strafford that the excursion had renewed, heightened, strengthened the barrier her reserve had erected and maintained between her and him. They were not *alienated*; for alas, a lien must precede alienation, and no lien save that of friendship had existed; and she was as *friendly* as ever — worse luck! Her regard for him was almost benevolence!

CHAPTER X.

LINCOLN, DOUGLAS, ZURY, AND OTHERS.

A YEAR has passed since the line was "chained to the stake." The railroad building is now well under way, and Jim's store has become something of a trading centre on account of its proximity to the "heavy work" of grading incident to dropping down to the Danfield level and crossing Spring River. There is a "boarding shanty" erected for the workmen, which, with its force of men and horses, relies on Jim's store for supplies of food and forage. So "Jimtown" has such a "boom" as it never enjoyed before, and will not again for many a year.

Supplies to meet this demand are sought for from far and near — even so far as the Proudler farm.

"Hello, Jim Sanders!"

"Why, hello, Uncle Zury; is that yew? Glad t' see ye. Hope ye've brought them oats — I'm 'most plum aout."

"Ya-as — I wuz a-teamin' t' Danfield, 'n' thort I mought 's well fetch 'em as come over flyin' light."

"Good enough! One, two, eight, sixteen bags. That makes thirty-two bushel, don't it?"

"Ya-as. Wanter measure 'em?"

"No, not after yew, Zury. But my bin won't hold over thirty bushel."

By this time a little knot of loungers had gathered around Zury's wagon. One of the onlookers, ambitious to "try his hand" on Zury Prouder, the far-famed "trader," called out:—

"Haow much fer oats, Uncle Zury?"

"Twenty cents a bushel, ef the's any Jim don't want. That's what Jim pays me."

"Naow look a-h'yer, Uncle Zury,—I ain't much of a hand t' trade; but I'll tell ye what I'll dew: I'll give ye twenty-five fer a couple o' bushel, ef ye'll let me tromp 'em daown in the measure."

"Twenty-five cents a bushel? Wal, my son, ye're a-tradin' with yer eyes open, be ye? Ye know I'm the meanest man in Spring Caounty t' git ahead of in a trade."

"Oh, I kin stan' it, ef yew kin. Twenty-five cents a bushel 's what I said, 'n' that 's what I'll stick tew;—stan' up t' the rack, fodder or no fodder—on the c'ndish'n ye let me tromp 'em daown in th' basket."

"Wal—ef Brother Sanders'll lend us a basket, 'n' stan' the wear 'n' tear of havin' ye tromp oats intew it, I dunno as I've any cause t' object."

"Sutt'nly, Rafe, sutt'nly," cried Jim. "Anythin' t' help along trade 'n' commerce in this great 'n' growin' Republic. H'yer 's a basket, 'n' I'll resk but what it'll stan' all the trompin' yew'll give it."

"Tew bush'l did ye say? Jest pass over a half-

a-dollar inter Brother Sanders' han's t' stan' th' upshot o' this h'yer dicker, ef yew please, Brother Rafe. Ye're a stränger t' me." The coin was produced and passed. "Naow let's have all this open 'n' above-board. I sell ye tew bush'l o' twenty-cent oats, for fifty cents; the extry ten cents bein' paid fer yer a-havin' th' priv'lidge o' trompin' 'em daown in Brother Sanders's baskit. Is that it?"

"That's th' whack! Measure 'em aout."

"Tew bushel — no more, no less."

"Ya-as, ya-as! Measure 'em aout."

By this time a curious little crowd had gathered, and they all looked on in silence while Zury poured the basket full of oats, entirely full, perhaps a little heaping. Then he said, "Thar, naow, thar's a good bushel o' oats — jump in an' tromp 'em all ye're a-min' ter."

The buyer eagerly stepped upon the yielding mass, and trod and stamped and packed it until the basket did not seem much over half full. (Oats are very compressible.)

"Thar!" he cried, as he stepped down. "Thar! Fill that up!"

"Fill what up? I never 'greed t' fill noth'n' up but once! Empty aout yer baskit; 'n' I'll measure off yer other bushel; 'n' ye kin tromp 'em all night ef ye want'er."

The roar of laughter that greeted this "cute" turn of the tables on the "Smart Aleck" of a buyer showed him that he had no aid or comfort to look for, so he joined the laugh good-naturedly,

emptied his dear-bought oats, and gave Zury the basket to refill. When the latter had done so he asked : —

“Wanter tromp 'em?” (Another roar of laughter.) “Coz ye 've paid for the priv'lidge, 'n' have a right t' dew 's ye 're a-min' ter.”

To this day, in Spring County, an absurd, superfluous, and unnecessary outlay of cash is likened unto “Rafe's dime he paid to be let tromp ontew his own oats.”

When Zury had got rid of all his oats, taking in a certain half-dollar that gave him more satisfaction than all the remaining six dollars put together, he prepared to set out for Danfield. As he was starting, Jim Sanders called out : —

“Hold on, Uncle Zury, 'n' ye kin git t' travel inter town along with Court.”

Zury looked across the prairie, and there he saw some ten or a dozen riders coming slowly along in a group. Evidently they were not farmers; for their prevailing costume was a touch above the “galoots,” as the native agriculturists playfully call each other. These men usually wore tall black hats, black “tail-coats,” single-soled boots, and “biled shirts,” with limp cotton collars rolling over black neckerchiefs tied in stringy bows. Each carried a pair of saddle-bags; presumably containing in one scanty and his entire wardrobe except what he had on him, and in the other a copy of either Blackstone's Commentaries, the Revised Statutes of Illinois, Jones' Forms of Procedure, or a traveling flask of whiskey — possibly,

more than one of these necessities of professional life. (Men who carried flasks and were suspected of resorting to them privately and alone were jocularly known as "gentlemen of *quiet tastes*.")

Zury and the group of horsemen rode forward together, and one of the latter, himself a stalwart specimen of manhood, began to urge the circuit judge (a very stout and very tired judge indeed) to ask for a ride in Zury's wagon.

"There, Judge, here's your chance. Hitch your horse behind our friend's wagon and jump in."

"Now, Brother Davis, don't you think you'd better take your own advice? You carry more weight than I do."

"Yes, Judge, but I don't carry so much of it in front, like a bass-drum. Remember we all want court to *sit* to-morrow — not stand up or lie down."

"You're right, David," said another; "at least about the lying. Counsel can do all of *that* that's necessary."

"Speak for yourself, Brother Bob," replied the deep voice of the future Supreme Court Justice. "You're a good judge about lying, but as to sitting, the judge here can beat you hollow with one hand tied behind his back and not half try. Now, Judge, this is likely about the last time we'll come to Danfield a-horseback; the railroad will fetch us next term or next but one, and I advise you to begin to get used to traveling in a sitting posture."

"Well, boys, I would n't mind a little wagon-

ing for a change, but by the Lord Harry, I don't really know whether or not I can ever get down off this beast alive! I say, my friend, do you want to play Good Samaritan and succor a man that's traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among lawyers and got sorely wounded?"

"Sartin, sartin," said Zury; "ye're heartily welcome to a ride — though if yer saddle is any harder than this board I'm a-settin' on it mus' be made o' cast iron."

"Oh, well — it ain't softness or the balm of healing I'm longing for, so much as to see how it feels once more to sit down like a Christian instead of spreading my legs out like a blamed saw-buck!" And the jolly jurist edged his horse so close to Zury's wheel that he managed to transfer his bulky frame from one to the other without getting down on the ground. By using the empty oat-bags, Zury and his companion managed to make a very comfortable seat in the springless vehicle. Then Zury, as was his wont, began to add to his stock of information. He asked the names of the others.

"The man who spoke to me about riding with you; that was David Davis. He is big, ain't he? Well, his mind is bigger than his body, and his heart is bigger than both put together."

"That's Davis, is it? Naow, who's that great little sawed-off cuss, no bigger th'n a pint o' peanuts? — 'n' yet — somehow" —

"Ha-ha! Don't you know him? Why, where were you half-raised? Don't know Steve Doug-

las! Sharper than a tack, too. He's little, but, oh my! Many think there did n't ever live a man who was half as wise as Stephen A. Douglas looks — but wait till they try him!"

"Then the long, shamblin' feller on the short nag; th't looks 's ef he wuz a-walkin' along 'n' a-totin' a hoss between his legs."

"That? That's Abe Lincoln. He's been to Congress, he has; but he did n't seem to catch on to much, so they did n't reëlect him."

"That Lincoln? Wal, naow; I *thort* I knowed him!"

"Ever come across him?"

"Jes' hold on a minute, 'n' see ef *he* knows *me*." Then driving up near Lincoln he called out, "Hello, Captain!"

Lincoln looked around with his grave, homely, good-natured face.

"Well, my friend — I've got just half an acquaintance with you, and will be glad if you'll supply the other half."

Zury raked up from his capacious memory the words used by some boyish tormentors of a runaway slave whom many, many years before Lincoln had rescued from their persecutions while Zury was looking on. He mimicked them.

"Jule! Jule! Hi, Jule! Yer ole boss hez come up in th' boat; 'n' he's jest a-layin' fer ye!" Then seeing a gleam of awakening recollection in Lincoln's eye he went on with the words of the latter. "Let him alone, boys! Ye ornery limbs! Want ter tromp onto a poor cuss when he's

daown?" Then changing his tone back to the boys' treble again: "Oho, Abe; lookin' aout fer fear yer ole uncle 'll git hurt?"

Lincoln's hearty laugh now rang out over the prairie, and he cried:—

"I've got it all now! Spring River: Flatboat: Runaway nigger! You're the boy that sold us those hogs! Give me your hand, my friend! We did well with those hogs, and I hope you did well with the money you got for them."

"Wal—fair—fair. I dunno's I've got anythin' *much* t' complain of, in th' way o' this world's goods."

"What might your name be, friend? If I heard it then, I've forgotten it."

"Praouder."

"What—Zury Prouder? The richest man in Spring County, as I've heard him called?"

"Oh, callin' him so don't make him so. Ef I'm the richest, the others mus' be pootty poor. Jest barely able t' pay my debts, 'n' keep my fam'ly in three meals a day."

"Family large, friend Prouder?"

"Pootty middlin' large, what the' is of it. All in one passel. Nobody but my wife." This was said in a slightly descending cadence—a tone that seemed to slope downward until all the laughter in heart and voice had run out.

"Well, well!" said his interlocutor, in a manner that showed recognition of Zury's regret. Then to change the subject he inquired: "What ever became of that darkey?"

"Why, next day I faound him up th' road a piece, e'enamost dead with cold 'n' starvation, 'n' I took him home 'n' kep' him thar' ever sence."

"Hush, hush, friend Prouder! Don't let Brother Douglas hear you talk about harboring a runaway slave, or he 'll tear you limb from limb!"

This was said in a loud stage whisper aimed at Douglas' ear; but the "Little Giant" paid no heed; so Lincoln kept on throwing verbal darts at him, as was his wont on all occasions.

"Brother Douglas is a true patriot, friend Prouder. He is a kind of a self-appointed dry-nurse to the United States of North America, and sits up with 'em nights, to preserve the Union. He's preserving the Union now! I see it in his eye!"

The rest laughed, but Douglas made no sign; so Lincoln continued:—

"Now, I don't object to a man preserving the Union once in a while; but to keep at it, day in and day out, when it don't really need preserving, reminds me of a little story in rhyme I've heard somewhere. It goes like this:—

There was a man in our town
His name was Matthew Mears,
He wound his clock up every night
For over forty years.
And when he found that blamed old clock
An eight-day clock to be,
A madder man than Matthew Mears
You'd hardly care to see.

Now suppose Brother Douglas should some day

wake up to the knowledge that he had been winding up the Union eight times as often as it needed winding up! A madder man than Stephen A. you 'd hardly care to see!"

"Well, gentlemen!" cried Douglas, in his clear, splendid voice, "laugh all you like; and you 'd better get through with your laughing as soon as you can, before you have to laugh on the other side of your mouths. I know the temper of the South, and I know that whenever you get ready to try to force your doctrines down its throat, it's ready to try to SECEDE FROM THE UNION." He roared out the last words with a resonance that clove the air and died away in the distance.

Lincoln made no direct reply, but catching sight of a large, bare, official-looking establishment surrounded with several rather abject specimens of humanity, which place the cavalcade was about to pass, and recognizing by many signs its character, he said:—

"Friend Prouder, what might that institution be called."

"Why, that's the Spring Caounty poor-farm."

"Friend Prouder; when Spring County tries to force its notions, together with its rations, down the throat of the poor-farm, does the poor-farm ever try to SECEDE FROM THE COUNTY?" And he roared in mimicry of Douglas.

General laughter made Zury's reply inaudible, and Lincoln went on:—

"I *guess* the war talk will come to nothing. I *guess* it will always stop just short of actual hos-

tilities. It reminds me of a leetle story that I 've told before now, but maybe some of you have n't heard it, so I'll tell it again. Where I lived, there were two next-door neighbors, each of whom had a savage dog; and every day, once, if not oftener, those two dogs would rush to the boundary fence, each on his own side, and snarl and bark and snap and bite at each other through the pickets, and race up and down the fence — always each keeping his own side — until they had worn the weeds all away, and there were two well-beaten paths almost the whole length of the fence. I say *almost* the whole: they never went quite down to the far end of the fence; and why? *Because there was a gap there* through which they could have got at each other and fought all they had a mind to! I guess neither North nor South will ever go down to where there's a gap in the fence."

"Very well, Mr. Lincoln. My guess against yours! My guess against yours! Call me a dough-face or any other name that suits you. I can wait for the time when you won't call me a fool, anyhow."

"Judge Douglas, I am not calling any names; and I don't pretend to say but what the South may try to secede; but I do say that I would rather *let it try*, than to have us keep on forever trying to keep it from trying. And when it does try to secede" — He did not finish the sentence; and a deep silence fell upon the party.

CHAPTER XI.

CIRCUIT COURT OF SPRING COUNTY.

AFTER Zury had put away his team and eaten supper, he strolled out in front of the weather-beaten frame structure which was then the only house of entertainment in Danfield — now a thriving and pretty city; with hotels, theatres, water-works, horse-cars, gas, electric lights, and other comforts and elegances of civilization; and inhabited by a cultivated society in keeping with itself.

There, on the long, low, wooden porch, almost level with the dusty road in front, were sitting in amicable, anecdotal confab, the judge and the attorneys of the ——th Judicial Circuit, comprising eight counties. The bench and bar were in the habit of journeying, on horseback, from county-seat to county-seat, holding in each its allotted term, and trying, before local juries, the causes that might be presented. This is called “riding the circuit,” and is described by one who knows it well as “*the happiest life ever led by mortal man.*” Nature, human and inanimate; adventure; politics; sense and nonsense; much wit and more laughter; and “law, law, law, till you could n’t rest!” What was lacking for the perfect exercise of body and mind? These men were making

the precedents which the bench and bar of to-day have to follow. That was creation and originality; this is memory and docility.

Some were sitting on the platform with their feet on the ground, their backs against the posts; more sat on chairs tilted back against the wall. When Zury joined them Lincoln happened to be in a favorite posture of his, "sitting on his shoulder-blades," and nursing his thin knees in front of his breast; his large hands clasped around his shins, while his long feet dangled in front. For a score of years afterward, through all the wild times of national convulsion, whenever Zury heard the name of Lincoln, in peace or in war, in life or in death, the quaint image he then saw rose again before his mind's eye.

"That reminds me of a leetle story."

This was Lincoln's formula for the introduction of anecdotes innumerable. Quaint, droll, witty, humorous; sometimes pathetic, always pat and persuasive, these yarns and illustrations were; whether used at the bar, in the horse-shed, on the road, on the stump, under the tavern-porch, or at a Cabinet meeting. Some of them really arose in his memory; more of them flashed upon his active fancy, and were coined as they were uttered. Does any one imagine, because a hundred or two of them have been recorded, that the world knows them all or nearly all? A score have perished or are perishing where one survives.

All his late fellow-travelers greeted Zury kindly — the circuit judge even volunteering unanswer-

able reasons why he should not rise and offer his seat. Lincoln said : —

“ Friend Prouder, I hear that they are talking of running you for the legislature.”

“ Wal — ya-as — some has be’n tryin’ t’ put up some sech a joke on me ; from which I jedge th’t they ’llaow to be beat in the race. I notice th’t when the’ ’xpect t’ win, the’ don’t hunt ’raound fer aoutsiders t’ share th’ stakes ; but when the’ expect t’ lose, the’ ’re awful lib’ral.”

“ Aha ! Probably they think some of the stock on the Prouder farm — live-stock or other — will help them pull the load up the hill.”

“ No ! To do ’em justice I guess they don’t expect no campaign-fund-contributions from the me-anest man in Spring County ! The’ don’t fool themselves with no sech crazy dreams as that, no more ’n the’ fool me with talkin’ ababout my gittin’ thar.”

“ Oh, well — let them try, and you jest try and help ’em a leetle. You don’t know where lightning might strike. I may be in the House myself, and whether I am or not, we want jest such men as you there — men that won’t steal, and that are too smart to be stole from.”

Next day, at the opening of court, Zury had a small case, — foreclosure on Hobbs’ farm, — and was compelled (not for the first time) to hear himself publicly denounced in court as a hard-hearted creditor ; an oppressor of the poor debtor ; a capitalist who ground the faces of his fellow-citizens. Zury got up to reply to the offensive

and to some extent unjust tirade, but the judge cut him off, saying that as the decree must go in his favor, there was no occasion to take the time of the court in hearing his side of the case. When the court adjourned and they all met at dinner, he had a chance to relieve his mind.

"Sech fellers is glad enough t' git my money — it's only payin' it back th't they object to. I've heer'd too much o' jest sech talk t' take much stock in it. Th' feller's poor — wal, what then? Dew these laoud-maouth galoots perpose t' git up a subscription t' help him? Ef the' dew, mebbe I mought give as much as anybody else. But that ain't what the' 're after. Not much! What the' want is fer me t' give between five 'n' six hundred dollars 'n' nobody else t' give a blame cent! Their idee o' charity is fer A t' tell B haow much C 'd orter give t' D. Smith 'n' Jones may quar'l pootty lively in school boards 'n' church meetin's 'n' one thing another; but the' 's one thing the' 're sure t' 'gree on; 'n' that is, what somebody else 'd orter dew — spesh'ly what Zury Praouder 'd orter give Burr Hobbs."

"Friend Prouder," said Lincoln, "did I understand you to say you'd give as much as anybody to help our friend the mortgagor?"

Among his usual associates, Zury would have been ready to assent to this, quite sure that it would cost him little or nothing; but, glancing toward the speaker, he saw looking at him from under shaggy brows a pair of dark eyes so kindly in their humorous twinkle that he checked himself — just in time.

"I said I *mought* go as fur. I 'd be willin' t' 'gree t' give as much as any man who 's made his money as hard as I have mine. As it is, the law gives the feller a year t' redeem in, and afore that runs raound he may git ontew his legs ag'in. But ef he dooz it'll be by doin' honest days - works like his neighbors; not by a-lyin' awake nights a-thinkin' who he kin begin a-quar'lin' with next mornin'. Th' world 's like a lookin'-glass — shake yer fist at it and ye 're sure t' see a fist shook back at ye."

Dr. Strafford (who was attending court on railroad business) here joined in the conversation.

"Hobbs is an incorrigible fool. It is only his wife I am sorry for." And he gave an account of his experience while laying out the line. "And it's his stupid fight against the company that has lost him all this mortgage money. Now common sense ought to tell him, as I have tried to tell him, that his farm is worth twice as much to-day as it was before the company touched his land."

"Haow 's that?" asked Zury, with a quick eye for good investments.

"Why, we had to make a rise of nearly sixty feet to the mile from here up the hill. That means doubling engines on trains climbing the hill, and *that* means a side track and a station just about where the line crosses his land."

"Sho! Is *that* so? Wal, naow; s'posin' ye wuz t' ask him haow much he'll take fer a quitclaim. I mought buy it in; 'n' not wait fer no mortgage-sale."

"Oh, he 'll not hear anything I say ! "

"Ner me nuther, I don't 'xpeck."

"See here, friends," said Lincoln, "I would just as soon take that little job. I 'll have no trouble in finding him — his voice will guide me all over town. He hollers so loud a blind man could hear him." And he sallied forth. In a few minutes he returned. "I found him — and his poor wife, too. Friend Prouder, that eighty is yours on the payment of five hundred and five dollars."

Zury made a rapid mental calculation, and then pulled his well-known big old pocket-book from his breast, silently counted out the sum named, and handed it to Lincoln.

"All right. I 'll draw the quitclaim and get both their names and acknowledgments."

When all was done, Lincoln took Strafford aside, and said quietly : —

"Could you see that poor creetur and give her this five dollars I took as my fee? Don't say anything about it before her husband, and don't, if you can help it, say where it came from."

"I shall have to tell her you gave it, I think."

"Oh, well — it don't matter. She 'll soon forget the name. Say it's for her dower-right. That's the fact, too. I should n't have charged any fee, if it had n't been for her."

Strafford found Zury, and told him what Lincoln had done, hoping that the nabob would do as well or better. He led the talk back to the incident of Phil's broken leg, and found himself booked for a long talk about the boy; his past,

his present, and his future. But when he turned the conversation in the direction of further aid for Mrs. Hobbs, the fountain of sympathy took a decided chill. The skinflint showed, in those days, no sign of the heart-softening which came to him later in life.

"Oh, as fer th' boy — I'm a savin' a leetle fer him when th' time comes — seein' I've knowed his — his folks so long. But Burr Hobbs and *his* folks; that's a gray hoss of another color."

He did give something, — pitifully small, though it looked large to his blinded vision, — and the doctor himself made up the whole to ten dollars, which the poor woman slipped furtively into her bosom; a sum greater than she had ever before controlled, in cash, at once, since she was born.

The unruly Hobbs had a case against the railroad company before the court; being the question of the sum he was to receive for the damage done to his lot by the "cater-cornering" of it by the railroad line. (This was not a claim "running with the land," therefore he did not part with it to Zury by transferring the title.) Douglas was counsel for the company, and Hobbs now engaged Lincoln, on the spur of the moment, to conduct his side of the case.

In the afternoon Zury attended court to hear this trial. It soon became very evident that Hobbs' neighbors, hating him and his ways more than they loved pure, abstract law, had, as appraisers, set the damages far below what they should have been; aiming to punish the disturber

of public peace for not accepting the liberal offer the company had made, and for other offenses whereof the fool had been guilty, against the strong, evenhanded sense of justice and propriety. Now the question was, whether or not the jury would try the same plan, or would decide simply "upon the law and the facts," irrespective of personal bias. Douglas, on behalf of his client, the railroad company, made a clear, logical, persuasive, and convincing speech; dwelling on the value of railroads, the benefit this road had done or would do to these farms, the willingness of other men — men on this very jury perhaps — to give more land than had been taken from Hobbs, charging nothing at all for it, the impropriety of telling the original appraisers that they were either knaves or fools, and so forth. The jury was evidently of his mind when he sat down, if before. Then came Lincoln's turn. Said he (after some generalities): —

• "My brother Douglas has made you a good speech. In fact, I always notice that Steve is sure to make a good speech when he has a bad cause. He is like a team o' horses — a first-rate team. You 'll always notice that a good team pulls hardest going up hill. Going along on a level they 'll take it mighty easy. Going down hill they 'll hang back till their tails flop over the dashboard and they come almost to a standstill. But put them at a stiff rise and they 'll just hump themselves: down go their heads, up go their tails — they strain every nerve till you can see the skin

wrinkle over their hips. The walk turns into a gallop! They either get there or deserve to for their noble efforts.

“Now my brother Douglas, — and he is a whole team and a horse to spare, — he felt that he had a heavy load behind him, and a hard hill before him. He tries railroad cases day in and day out by the year together; knows them from *a to izzard* — been where they are raised, and helped kill and skin them, as the boys say. He can try them with his eyes shut and one hand tied behind his back. He lies awake nights, when you and I and other common folks are asleep, devising ways to win railroad cases for his client, the great, soulless corporation. If power could defeat justice, if eloquence could blind the common sense of such an intelligent body of men as that I see before me, sitting in those twelve hard chairs, my client would stand a poor show to-day.

“But let us look into this a little. I find, on reference to my notes, that the first point dwelt upon by Judge Douglas was this.” And he stated the point in question with great fairness, and added, “But all this has nothing to do with the merits of this case.”

He proceeded to show why the case should turn on another question entirely, and then set the irrelevant matter aside by a gesture representing the picking up of a mass of stuff and depositing it on the table at his left hand.

Another and another point he treated in the same manner; always calling the attention of the

jury to the ever growing dimensions of the heap on his left. From time to time he would come to a matter which, as he was willing to concede, did have some bearing on the rights of the dispute; and this he would make believe to place at his right hand. When he had gone through the entire speech in this fashion he (in pantomime) pushed off to the floor the whole pile of irrelevant trash, and turning his attention to the few things which he had minuted as being truly applicable, he demolished them as best he might, and stated his own case in rebuttal.

While doing this, his client, passion-blinded, could not restrain his insensate rage, but let it boil over in interruptions sure to prejudice his case; and though the court rebuked him he persisted in the folly until threatened with expulsion from the court-room. Douglas smiled meaningly at the jury, confident of winning a verdict now that he had this aid from the enemy.

Lincoln did the best he could under the adverse circumstances, adapting his dialect to the vernacular of his hearers, as was his wont when in a strait.

“My client has n’t yet learned the great truth th’t every lawyer tries to teach every client—that it’s foolish after ye’ve bought a dog to go on and do your own barkin’. But the worm will turn when he’s trod upon. Power thar in the great soulless corporation; power thar in an able advocate; weakness h’yer in a simple citizen smarting under a sense of wrong until he even hurts

his own cause in his helpless distress. Where can an ally be found t' even up the scales of justice until they once more stand at a balance? Where, except in a free jury — the champion of the oppressed — the palladium of American liberty. I have heard it said that the railroad system in our country has grown to be stronger than the jury system. Well, maybe it's so — *but it's doubted by some!*"

The judge charged the jury with an evident leaning to Hobbs' side, looking at the matter, as he properly did, unbiased by any consideration of the insolence of the plaintiff, or of the troublesome temper which had made Hobbs a thorn in the side of the community for years. But the jury took the bit in their teeth, and found a verdict for the railroad company. The judge sat in grim silence while the clerk took the verdict, and then roared out: "Mr. Clerk, let that verdict be set aside and a new trial granted! I want it understood that while I sit on this bench it takes thirteen men to steal land in Spring County!"

"Will the court listen to me one moment?" cried Douglas in a voice that showed his anger. "The plaintiff has not asked for a new trial: and when he does, I have a right to be heard on the motion!"

"Not to-day, brother Douglas. Take an exception, and go up, if you like. You know there are six old chaps sitting at Mount Vernon on purpose to correct my errors — they've got the last guess on your case. Take your exception."

The day was warm ; it was a busy season ; the case was one almost devoid of general interest, and when Mr. Lincoln closed there were not a dozen spectators in the court-room. These phenomenal men, who within the same generation were to have the ear of the world, men whom their fellow-citizens would traverse a continent merely to set eyes upon, did their work in quiet unconsciousness of any impending fame or fate ; all unnoticed and unknown.

Strafford now readily settled with Hobbs on the fair basis originally proposed by the railroad company. Hobbs took his cash and his household goods away from the Danfield region, and planted a new vine and fig-tree far off in the northwest on the Galena Railroad,—a good riddance for the former and a bad acquisition for the latter ; and the eighty turned out to be one of the best of Zury's good investments.

CHAPTER XII.

“INVITED TO TEA AT THE McVEYS’.”

“GENTLEMAN? Of course I ’m a perfect gentleman! Why, bless your heart, I ’ve been invited to tea at the McVeys’!” Such was the boast, in a convivial moment, of a young sprig of the law, who, having fallen into bad habits, was certain never to be so honored again.

This became a favorite joke in Springville. Half in jest and half in earnest, Anne’s few invitations were held to be the hallmark of gentility. The dozen and more of years she had lived there (during which the town had tripled in size and quadrupled in wealth) made her one of the “old residents,” and the new money brought there or made there, however it might outshine, could not overshadow the position given her by her speech and manners, and the fact that her quiet influence began before its acquisition, and lived on in serene disregard of it. Necessarily, even in the prosperous West, affluence is the exception; and the unaffluent many looked with satisfaction upon the high-bred McVeys, who cared not at all for other people’s possession of money, or for their own lack of it.

So the dashing Chicago man, who came down

to buy wheat and lend money at two per cent. a month, might put on patronizing airs and "talk big" in vain. He had never "been at tea at the McVeys'." Neither had the aspiring politician and would-be congressman, who subscribed impartially to all the churches, from Universalist to Catholic, inclusive; offending all the others when he gave his support to each. But the ill-off academy teacher and his wife, who had won Meg's heart by their plain, unpolished learning and their devotion to duty — they had sometimes been favored, and so belonged among the "first circles."

Anne heard of this little matter through Strafford, and was not quite sure that she liked it.

"Come to tea? Of course I will! Who could afford to miss a chance to emphasize the fact that he is in good society?"

"Are we good society?"

"Yes. Did you never hear that the *crème de la crème* of Springville is composed entirely of those who have taken tea at your house?"

"No, indeed! How little cream there must be on the pan if that is the test!"

"That is one of the things that make it so precious — its scarcity. How have you managed to be exclusive without being unpopular?"

"Oh, I suppose it is by living here so long and minding my own affairs and having no policy; and by being poor and humble; and by having so little to exclude anybody from that nobody cares whether he is excluded or included."

"Well, the length of your residence has some-

thing to do with it, but as to humility — I don't think anybody ever called you humble! There is n't a man, woman, or child in town that wouldn't feel flattered by an invitation, and yet they pardon your not giving it! That's what puzzles me."

"It's news to me — if it is the fact."

"I assure you of the fact; and the only explanation I can find for it is — the smile you give Tom and Dick when you invite Harry and leave them out!"

"Doctor," said Meg; "I think I know who Harry is."

"Hush, Meg! Speak low — don't let anybody except you and me know that I am Harry!"

"But who are Tom and Dick?"

"Oh the —s, and the —s, and the —s, and all the rest. But the fun of it is that Tom and Dick forgive your mother and can't forgive me!"

"Well, perhaps I have been wrong. I ought to treat all alike."

Strafford was evidently disconcerted and distressed. Said he: —

"Mrs. McVey, — if my frankness has brought disaster upon me, — if you *should* begin withholding the light of your countenance from me — my world will be dark indeed!"

"Would you have me become the subject of gossip?"

"But, Mamma! What difference can it make to you? It is just as the doctor says — nobody blames *you*."

"How do you know, my child? Have you heard anything said?"

"No — nothing but what Phil has told me."

"What is it, Philip?"

"Why, nothing at all, Mother. Only — that somebody must be all right because he's been at tea at the McVeys'! Just a joke, you know."

"Who was the particular person mentioned?"

"Oh — in that particular case I guess it was Dr. Strafford."

Anne did not reply, but the others saw (by her tapping the floor with her foot, and her teeth with her fingers) that she was disturbed and displeased.

"But, Mamma!" cried Meg, "Phil says that nobody said anything about us. It was only about Dr. Strafford."

"Yes," said blundering Phil. "The railroad boys just *gave* it to Dr. Strafford! Said that if you set him down on any doorstep, and let him go, he'd run right to our house! As if he were a cat, you know!"

The sudden gloom that fell upon the group showed the boy that he had made a mistake. Nevertheless, he scorned to take anything back — he braved it through.

"I don't care what they said about him, or about us! Even if they had laughed at us instead of at him, I'd stand up for him. What do they all amount to, I'd like to know, compared to him? Where should I be if he had n't been — what he has?"

"And where should I be if you had n't all been what you have? Heaven forbid that anything should come between you and me!"

"Oh, Doctor!" cried Meg, looking at him with moist eyes, "nothing can ever come between us! Tell him so, Mother."

"It certainly never shall, if I can help it," said Anne; and she tried through the rest of his visit to smooth over the little unpleasantness. When he arose to depart she accompanied him to the gate, first motioning the children to remain within.

He had long been fruitlessly scheming for a private word with her; but now he sadly feared that this was not going to be such an interview as his soul craved.

"Now you see, my dear Doctor, that people are coupling your name and ours together. Tell me, now—like a true friend—how it can be remedied."

He bowed his forehead on the gate-post, and kept silence.

"I do not say it is your fault—and I do not say that it is not *my* fault. But it will be the fault of both of us if it is not remedied."

After some further pause he lifted his face quickly, and putting on an air of gay superiority to all weakness (which was a mere assumption of strength, for he was dreadfully cast down) he cried:—

"Well! The cure is simple."

"How can it be effected?"

"Oh—there is no need of going into detail. The first step is for me to wish you a very good-night!" and he lifted his hat jauntily, and strode away in the moonlight.

Once more Anne asked herself in dismay what she had done? What was he going to do? Drop her and hers forever? Oh dear — what a friend he had been! More than a friend — a younger brother. More than a younger brother — an older son. More than an older son — a chivalric admirer — an adoring lover, if she could only have permitted it.

“Dr. Strafford!” Oh, why did he whistle, and walk away so fast!

“Dr. Strafford!! Doctor!!!” No use; he was going like a steam-engine. She opened the gate and flew after him, only catching him after a long chase which left her panting and disheveled.

“Oh, Doctor! What have I done? What are you going to do? What have I done — again!”

“Oh, nothing desperate, you may be sure. I sha’n’t kill myself, nor even die a natural death, yet awhile.”

“No — but you are going away angry — perhaps justly angry — and you are never coming back any more!” and she fairly broke down and burst into tears.

“Why, Anne! — for me!” and before she knew what he would be at, he had thrown his arm about her neck, and kissed her forehead.

“Oh, no! I did not mean *that*! Now you have made me sorry I called you back!”

“Well — I have something in my memory that even absence cannot take from me!”

“For shame! An extorted kiss! No mark of

favor or affection! I don't see how you can prize such a thing!"

"No, I suppose you don't. But that's because you're not a man, only a woman."

"I am a woman, and you are *only* a man!"

"Well; any way you like. But, Anne — oh, Anne, my beloved — be my wife, and stop all idle tongues!"

"Never! But oh — George" (how sweet it sounded to him!) "be my elder son, or my younger brother!"

"I *could* say 'never,' but it would be plagiarism: and besides, I am not so hard-hearted as you are. So I'll keep my cruel thoughts to myself, and say 'I'll try' — though it's a falsehood all the same, because I will *not*. What! Give up being your lover? The joy of my lonely life? That is the one thing you can ask of me in vain!"

"Well; say you will try, whether true or false."

"I will try, whether true or false."

"No, no! Say 'I will try,' and don't add anything."

"I will try, and don't add anything."

"You are incorrigible! Take me home."

"Are you angry?"

"I should be, only I used up all my cup of wrath on the people who can't let us alone. The fury-cell in my brain only holds a thimble-full: it soon runs over, and still sooner runs dry."

"You angel! Or rather — what is better — you perfect woman!"

"You perfect goose! Give me your arm. I ought not to be so agitated, and run so fast — at my age!" (A little slow walking in silence.) "Come, Doctor — say something, if it *isn't* so bright!"

"*You* talk. Abuse me — talk sense — nonsense — anything so only that I can hear your voice. You spoiled beauty!"

"Spoiled beauty!" she cried, with a burst of laughter. "Yes, indeed! Spoiled in the making."

"That's right; nonsense does as well as anything else. More, please."

"'In Adam's fall we sinnèd all; Your life to mend this Book attend; Xerxes the great did die, and so must you and I; Young Obadiah, David, Josiah, all were pious; Zaccheus he did climb the tree his Lord to see; Uriah's beauteous wife made David seek his life'" —

"If Bathsheba looked half as lovely in her moonlight as you do in this, I don't blame David."

"The low, treacherous old brute! I dare say you rather admire him!"

"Who is the Uriah I must slay in order to win you?"

"I won't tell you. You'd prescribe for him — and then I should have murder on my soul."

"Did you see him while you were at Way-back?"

"Stop! You are going too far!" She gave his arm a hard shake and turned away her face.

"I do believe" — But she drew away her hand, and he was silent in order that he might

recapture it. "Well — must I absent myself from the beloved McVey tea-table?"

"How can Phil spare you? And — how can Meg and I spare you?"

"In the matter of worldly advantage it will make no difference. I shall do my level best for you and yours, even if I should never set eyes on you again."

"Oh, Dr. Strafford — you disarm me! Let things go on as before — George."

And so they reached the gate. Anne drew it shut between her and him, and offered him her hand. When he wished to kiss it, she demurred, but said: —

"On one condition: that is, that you never, *never* again offend me as you did a while ago."

He held out his hand, and she placed hers in it again.

"Remember! If you kiss my hand, I understand it as a pledge — the pledge I asked." He did not kiss it.

"Won't you stay out here a little while?"

"What! Wear out front gates at my time of life? No, thank you! The hinges have already been broken once, and hinges are expensive."

"Already been broken? Who was he?"

"Ha, ha! My other son, Phil, of course! Oh dear me, how much trouble my two boys do give me!"

"Siren! Ogress! Cruelty personified!"

"Angel, siren, ogress — what a vocabulary you possess, Dr. Strafford!"

"Say George, again!"

"No!"

"I'll bribe you to say it. Say 'George' once and I will go away."

"Well, then, good-night — George," and he departed.

She went to the swing and sat down in it gently, so that its familiar squeak should not bring out the children at once, before the ruffled plumes of her spirit should have time to be smoothed down. As she sat dreamily in the shadow, her cheek against the hand that grasped the rope, the gate opened again, and Strafford hastily approached. She rose.

"I do not like this, sir!"

"I tremble at my temerity; but listen a moment. I only came to speak again on the servant question."

"Oh, that is exhausted. There is not a person to be had in town who would not be more trouble than use. All untaught, flighty girls; above the business, and only wishing to work long enough to get a new dress, or a wedding outfit — the fools!"

"Not fools in wishing to get married."

"Well — no matter."

"But I have a better plan. Over near Danfield, I know a queer couple, 'Hannerann' Felser and her husband, Balty. Hannah Ann is middle-aged, strong, capable, and sensible. Balty is younger, but a cripple. I have devised a frame for his weak back that makes him more nearly a

man than he ever was before in his life. He is correspondingly happy, and his wife absurdly grateful."

"No children?"

"No, indeed! The idea is absurd!"

"I have no room for them."

"Of course not. But I have;—a room attached to my barn, where they could both live, while he attended my horse, and she your house."

"What wages?"

"Oh—to you—" He paused to consider how little could be named without arousing her suspicions; wishing he could put it at about one cent a century, payable at the end of the term. "Whatever girls are getting. A dollar or so a week."

"No girl works out for less than two dollars."

"Would that be too much for you? Because, at odd times, she could do washing and other things for me that cost me—about a dollar a week."

"Nonsense! A dollar a week! No, I can pay her two dollars a week, and she can do your little matters for nothing. I am sure she would owe you that small return."

"Oh, well—I'll fix that. What say you to making the experiment?"

Anne conned the problem in silence. Meg ought certainly to be freed from some of the household cares which the dear young jewel had taken more and more into her strong and willing hands. And then when Meg should have more leisure it

would be easier for Anne to avoid being left in *tête-à-tête* with Strafford: a problem which had troubled her somewhat, and might be still more puzzling in the future.

"Well; I'll talk it over with the children; my other children." She held out her hand, and as he took it she lifted it toward him, saying, "Take the pledge."

"Never! Give me liberty or give me death!"

"Oh, well; liberty for choice of those two evils. But be careful not to *take* liberties."

"Certainly not! What part of my conduct would lead you to think so ill of me?"

"Your memory is short."

"Liberty? I have forgotten what the word means! Slavery; willing, enthusiastic slavery is my pride and glory, my solace, my hope — you — you — I try in vain to think of some character in history or fiction whose only fault was inhuman, cold-blooded, fiendish cruelty!"

"Now run home, Georgy-porgy, like a good little boy, and don't stop to play with other little boys on the road!"

"Cruel as you are, you are my solace — my one blessing."

"Am I your blessing? Then I think I'll brighten."

"By ceasing to be cruel?"

"No. By taking my flight. You know the poet says: 'Blessings brighten as they take their flight.' Now see me brighten!" And she took her flight.

He went home in a state of elation, in spite of her gay disdain. There is some joy in having reached the intimacy of a recognized suitor, even though a rejected one. The man and woman have at least a tender secret together; and "to-get-her" seems to the man so easily divisible into three words!"

When Anne went in Phil said:—

"Well, you evidently have n't had a quarrel with the doctor, as we were afraid you would."

"No, indeed! I hope none of us will ever quarrel with Dr. Strafford."

"You look more as if he had told you of your long-lost uncle's having died and left you a large fortune in silver and gold!"

"No silver except the moonlight, and no gold except his goodness." And to change the subject she sang a stanza of the sweet old song, "Roll on, silver moon." But the subject would n't change. Meg took it up next.

"Well, Mother, he must have told you *some* good news or other. Just the moon could n't have stayed in your eyes all this time like *that*."

"Well, dears, if you must know, we have been talking about the servant question;" and she detailed the plan to them; spinning it out as much as possible, so as to account, at least in some degree, for the length of her absence. Yet after all Phil persisted.

"But I should think from the time you took we might expect to see a procession of servants, reaching from Danfield here, begin to arrive first

thing in the morning, and keep on coming for a week, in a steady stream."

"Yes," cried Meg; "like the Arabian Nights; 'The Princess Badoura clapped her hands, and there entered two thousand slaves with jars of jewels on their heads.'"

"The doctor did say something about slavery, but I forget exactly what. Now go to bed, and get up bright and early to-morrow to watch for the head of the procession and the jewels."

As she kissed them good-night she said to herself: —

"Jealousy! And so utterly causeless!" Then she went to bed herself — and lay awake a while.

CHAPTER XIII.

RAILROAD ; AND OTHER NOVELTIES.

LACK of money (euphuistically termed "certain slight difficulties in a matter of detail") had delayed the completion of the railroad, but at length the proud day arrived when the first train was to start from Springville. Great excitement prevailed ; and the neighborhood of the station was crowded. Farmers for miles around had set chairs in their farm-wagons, set their wives in the chairs, set the babies in the wives' laps, and the older children in all available cracks and crannies, and driven to the nearest hitching-place. Then, leaving the team to munch corn over the tail-board, they carried the babies and convoyed the wives to some convenient coign of vantage, whence they could all see the wonderful sight.

The two engines possessed by the railroad were attached to its entire equipment of cars : chiefly a long line of open construction-trucks, fitted with cross-boards for seating passengers (of whom there was no lack), and the two passenger-coaches and two other close cars brought up the rear.

The day was splendid, as is usually the case at prairie fêtes, and the preparations were long and arduous, but all in the best of good humor and

jocular familiarity. Every official called every other (and many of the passengers) by some friendly nickname, framed on his real cognomen, or based on some personal peculiarity or occupation, — Strafford being "Doc" to everybody.

"Hello, Loram!" called the perspiring conductor to the head engineer. (His name was Hiram, but they called him Loram because he was so very short.)

"Hello, yerself, corn-doctor, and see how it feels!" was the polite response.

"Ain't you fellers 'most ready with yer blamed ol' scrap-heaps?" (A "scrap-heap" is the contemptuous term for a poor locomotive.) "We're a-gittin' tired o' waitin' back h'yer!" (He hadn't been ready a fraction of a second.)

"Be'n ready fer a coon's age! Begun t' think ye'd changed yer mind, 'n' worn't a-goin' t' start till Christmas."

"Wal, why did n't ye say so, two hours ago? Toot yer horn and let her flicker!"

So both engines blew awful shrieks from their whistles, and set their clanging, discordant bells to swinging.

"Git aboard, all that's goin'!" the conductor shouted, and added in a lower tone, "Them as can't git a board, git a rail, and them as can't git a rail, git a splinter!"

"Hei-gh!" shouted the crowd, in the wild, shrill falsetto which is the spontaneous cheer of the frontier; and slowly the engines began their pull, — the long series of cars taking their motion, one

at a time from each other with a jerk and a rattle — and they were off ; leaving a noisy and excited crowd gazing after the wonderful sight.

“ Ain’t that a show ? ” “ Yew bet ! ” “ Beats the circus ! ” “ See ’em scoot ! ” “ Aout o’ sight a’ready ! ” “ Must be more ’n five hundred souls a-flyin’ along over the prairie that-a-way.” “ Oh, John — s’posen the’ wuz t’ run off th’ track ! ” “ Wal, Elviry, the’ d every one on ’em be killed, that’s all ! ” “ Law sakes alive ! Mebbe she’s off the track a’ready, and they’re all dead by this time ! Nobody left t’ tell the’r friends t’ come ’n’ sort ’em aout ’n’ bury ’em ! ”

But they did not run off the track, so this frightful slaughter did not occur. The rear passenger-coach was occupied by the railroad people and their families ; including Strafford and the McVeys. It was a proud day for the doctor and Phil. Every foot of the road they had tramped over repeatedly. They had calculated every embankment (“fill”), and every excavation (“cut”), knew the radius of every curve, and the length of every straight stretch (“tangent”), and, in fact, were the general cyclopedia of knowledge, to which all questions were referred. They were given the post of honor ; the hindmost seats of the rear coach, where railroad men love to ride for convenience of inspection of the road-bed.

“ Oh, Phil ! Who is that handsome young woman in the front part of this car — the one who seems always looking back at us ? ” asked Meg.

“ Why, that’s — that’s Mrs. Sanders ; wife of the conductor.”

"What?" cried Strafford. "Jim Sanders' wife! Why, so it is! Just look at her eyes and cheeks, Mrs. McVey! Isn't she a picture? And how she enjoys things! Of course this is her first experience."

"Is that your guess, or do you know?"

"Oh, we know her, don't we, Phil?"

"Yes, we've seen her before."

"She seems to remember you with a good deal of interest. Why don't you go and speak to her, Doctor?"

"Why — it's Phil who ought to do that. He is the attraction. You wouldn't believe it, but that rustic belle was a slatternly bound-girl at one of the farmhouses we stayed at while running our first preliminary survey."

"Is she the girl you mentioned as taking notice of Phil on that trip?"

"The very one. She married Jim Sanders, who kept a country store near the road; and now Sanders has sold out his store, and taken up the more exciting life of a conductor. Philip, I think she would be extremely pleased to renew the acquaintance."

"I think she is anything but good-looking," said Mrs. McVey. "She seems to be a very bold person, and I request that my son should not renew the acquaintance, either now or at any other time."

"Oh, she would n't care to see me," said Phil, "but she would be very much tickled if I would introduce her to *you*. May I go and bring her

here?" And he pretended to start away for that purpose.

"No, indeed!" indignantly replied Anne.

"Alas for the rarity, and so forth," cried Strafford. "It might be the best thing in the world for that poor, ignorant creature — her salvation, perhaps."

"Well; I believe my school-teaching days are over. I have all I can do now to take care of my own flesh and blood."

Strafford did not reply; but even at that moment it struck him as possible that the best care for her "own flesh and blood" might be the exercise of a wise and womanly influence over the unwise, untamed woman she shrank from as if with an instinctive presage of ill.

At Danfield all were royally entertained by the hospitable villagers. "Open house" was the rule; all strangers were freely offered a good dinner at any private residence where they chose to apply, and the only disappointed citizens were those who chanced to be slighted and were compelled to eat up their "spread" themselves.

Hannerann and her husband were among the passengers on the return trip, but in the great crowd they were not seen by Anne and her party.

Next morning, however, Mrs. Felser was conveyed to the cottage in good season by Strafford.

"Lawzee suz, what a 'cute place t' live intew!" was Hannerann's first exclamation, as Dr. Strafford brought her in through the gate.

"Mrs. McVey, this is Hannah Ann Felser.

By the way, as your own name is Anne — Anne — ” (he could n’t resist the temptation to repeat the sweet monosyllable) “ I suppose you can just shorten hers to Hannah.”

“ Well — just as she likes about that. I think every one has a right to his name.”

“ Oh, I ain’t noways p’tickler. As my ole dad useter ’llaow, ‘ Call me anything ye like, so’s ye don’t call me late t’ dinner.’ What’ll suit yew’ll suit me ; ’n’ so thar ye be ! See ? ”

“ Well, then, I’ll call you Hannah. It will save breath ; and some day I will want all the breath I can get, and more.”

“ Ya-as, thet’s what we ’m all a-comin’ tew sune er late. Th’ only thing’s t’ be prepared ; ’n’ thar ye be ! See ? ”

“ Come to think of it, I guess it will be better all around to call you Mrs. Felser. This is my daughter, Margaret, Mrs. Felser.”

“ Pleased t’ meet ye, Marg’ret. Heern tell on ye some ; but not equal t’ yer brother Phil. He were aout a-railroadin’ with th’ doctor h’yer, ’n’ it seems ’s though everybody hed a good word t’ say fer little Phil. Noth’n’ p’tickler, only ’cause he *wuz* so young, ’n’ yet up ’n’ a-comin’ every time ! Why, who’s this ? ”

“ Philip, my son, this is Mrs. Felser, who is coming to be our help — for a while.”

“ Wal, wal ! Ef I’d ’a’ mistrusted this h’yer young man t’ ’a’ be’n that thar leetle boy, I should n’t ’a’ spoke my mind so free. But it’s all the same in a hundred years ; ’n’ thar ye be ! See ? Pleased t’ meet ye, sir.”

"Thank you, Mrs. Felser. I'm very glad to see you, and I hope you'll like it."

"Who, me? No fear but what *I'll* like sech a place as this h'yer. Who c'd help it?" And her memory ran back over the squalid abodes of her past; the noisy, crowded, toilsome, and dirty "boarding-shanty," the semi-starvation in the hovel which was all that poor Balty had been able to offer her; which, bad as it was, was not much worse than the environments of her earlier youth as one of a huge family of poor immigrants from Germany.

Now here she was; her dear Balty "set up like a man" as to his body, with Dr. Strafford's frame and belts; and also established in self-supporting respectability as the doctor's stable-boy. And there was their own separate abiding-place, serving (in her eyes) the important end of privacy for the Felser household, and (in the doctor's view) the far more essential desideratum of freedom in the McVey cottage except during the working hours of each day.

Everything conspired to make Hannah Ann Felser the best possible "help" for Anne. Her laborious past made the simple cottage duties only "common amusement" for her. Anne was so pleased to find the tasks all accomplished as if by magic that she could not help fearing that the new broom would soon get tired of sweeping so clean; but no: the floors and stairs seemed to get scrubbed, the cow milked, the butter churned, the laundry-work done, and so forth, as if spon-

taneously or by magic. The enthusiast soon had a barrel set up slanting and filled with ashes to make lye for their own soft soap, and announced herself ready, in case a swarm of bees should come by, to lure them (by means of a tin pan assault on their tympanums) into a clean box placed ready in close proximity to the leach-barrel.

"But, Mrs. Felser," Anne asked, on reaching home one afternoon, "what is this dreadful smell?"

"Wal, ye see the' wuz right smart o' grease tew good fer soap-fat goin' t' waste. So I thort I'd jes' dip a few candles." And she pointed to sundry strings of wicking hanging from sticks in various parts of the yard to cool off after being dipped in the fragrant pot of melted tallow, and before being dipped in it again and again until each should have attained a reasonable bigness.

"Oh, but dear me! — this dreadful smell!"

"Wal, ain't the wind right fer it? Blows right away fr'm th' haouse; 'n' thar ye be! See? I looked aout fer that!"

"But right toward somebody else's house! Well, there's no help for it now." But before those "dips" were all used up she wished that they had "died a-bornin'" as Hannah would have phrased it. Their fat wicks became glowing coals almost as soon as they were lighted, and offended the nose quite as much as they assisted the eye, until they were blown out — and afterward. But they were only a passing trial. Phil was encouraged to light half a dozen at once

to illuminate his evening exercises at the drawing-board connected with his engineering education; and a fortnight saw the final extinction of Hannah's store of rush-lights, which would have lasted a year in many a farmhouse.

After a discreet delay, Strafford asked, one evening:—

“Well, how are we on the great domestic problem—the ‘servant-gal question’? How does the experiment work?”

A chorus of enthusiastic replies greeted his pleased ears.

“We are only afraid we shall wake up and find it all a dream! Too good to be true, or at any rate permanent.”

“Oh, it will last. Never fear.”

“You have great confidence in Hannerann.”

“Oh, it is n't Hannah Ann I rely on as a marvel of good sense and good feeling. It is Anne,—Anne alone.”

“I? I am only a passenger. I have hardly enough sense for one, let alone supplying discretion for both mistress and maid.”

“Well, now, don't you think that the trouble in the relation is oftener chargeable to mistress than maid?”

“Who am I that I should sit in judgment on my kind?”

“You? You have, on the whole, the best balanced mind I ever met! You furnish the daily supply of brains for both you and Hannerann—not to speak of all the rest of us—and that accounts for your smooth domestic relations.”

Anne rose and made a mocking curtsy, grand and graceful enough for a comedy duchess, and said : —

“Your Highness is pleased to flatter!” (But a smile and blush showed that Her Grace was pleased to be flattered.)

“I wonder how you came to appreciate labor as you do!”

“It’s very simple. You try being a factory-girl in youth, a school-teacher in young-womanhood, and a book-keeper in old age, and see if you don’t respect toil all your life!”

“Yes; that’s all very fine, but many women, after experiences at least as hard as that, are great failures as mistresses. They have the requisite practice, but not the theory. How did you get the theory?”

“Dignity of labor? Oh, I was a newspaper writer in the early Fourierite movement, you know.”

“Pity all women could not study Fourierism!”

“So far as that point, I wish they could. If they would only stop there!”

“Amen! But even all those formative influences would not be a sure recipe for making the practical woman.”

“Then let her try earning a living, year after year for her mother, and then for two splendid children — not to speak of herself.”

“Oh, I suppose that with the very best and most perfect natural material, that kind of training might produce an Anne McVey — once in a thousand years or so.”

"Nonsense! As the boys say, 'the woods are full of them.' I apply means to ends, that's all. I know which side my bread is buttered on."

"To that I retort 'nonsense!' No such simply selfish feeling animates or guides you in your treatment of Hannerann. Now, as a test — tell me how you regard her?"

"Well — let me see; how *do* I feel toward her? I think — yes, I am sure, I am personally fond of her."

"There! I knew it! And she perfectly adores you, of course. Who could help it? (Who in her position, I mean, you understand.) Now I can't suppose you consider her an ideal servant."

"Well, scarcely!" replied Anne, laughing gayly. "The ideal servant would be a machine, quite unlike poor dear Hannerann in training, speech, manners, and personal appearance."

"Now I will wager anything you like that poor dear Hannerann has not the slightest suspicion of such a thing! No word you have ever said or left unsaid — nothing you have ever done or left undone — has given her that feeling of inferiority with the mortification it would cause."

"I never thought of it."

"Of course not! Now do you know what many women would have done? They would have made their ideal of servantism a procrustean bed, and spent their days and nights in trying to make poor dear Hannerann fit it! When she felt mortified they would be glad, as having taken a step toward perfection."

“Oh, I know! There are many geese who don’t wear feathers — except in their bonnets. Now *I* think that is the best government which governs least, in households as well as in nations.”

“Right you are! But those other women would ask how you can teach servants except by finding fault. How do you teach poor dear Hannerann? I see that she improves.”

“Does n’t she? Well, what she does well I praise; so she knows that what I don’t praise she does n’t do well. And sometimes I venture to do well something that she has done ill — but I am very cautious in the use of desperate remedies like that!”

“And then I’m sure you don’t hurry her education.”

“No, indeed! I believe in Nature’s methods, which are said to take no account of time. What cannot be accomplished in an hour I am willing to wait for a day, a week, or a month.”

“I warrant you! I quite envy poor dear Hannerann her experience under your tutelage.”

“Thank you — I do not think of making a change at present, and do not need a butler.”

“Ah! Please let me know if an opening should occur.”

“I will — especially as you are the very person to whom we owe all our domestic success. You are a splendid manager! almost as great a fixer of things as —

“Well, as who?”

“Oh, as — Julius Cæsar.”

"No; that was not what you were going to say."

"Well, then, as Napoleon Bonaparte."

"He was not the one either. Whom did you have in your mind?"

"Oh, well; — any other great planner. Those comparisons are good enough: I'm not going to hunt for a better. At any rate it was a man: we women are not up to those deep-laid, far-reaching schemes of you men. Sometimes I almost wonder how we could get along without you!"

"How very kind! Don't you think both get on better in double harness than either alone?"

"Well, no; not exactly that. Each may better keep to himself, and call out to the other for help as occasion requires."

"Very well; only you don't call often enough, and you don't follow our advice promptly enough."

"That seems ill-timed, considering that we have just followed your advice to the letter."

"Yes, you have this time; and you are glad of it. Now *hæc fabula docet* — there is a moral to the tale."

"Propound."

"Well, the moral is simply, always do as I say and you will always be glad."

"Well, of all the modest and reasonable suggestions!"

"Quite right! Modest and reasonable are the very words I was about to apply to my proposition. Do you accept it?"

"If I were to accept, there would be a string tied to my acceptance."

“What for?”

“Oh, to pull it back with if you tried to carry it too far away. For instance, if you asked me to take your advice in some case where the taking of it would lead to something irrevocable.”

A sigh was Strafford's response to this rebuff: and Phil (whose presence they had almost forgotten) burst in with:—

“I don't see what there could be you could n't try for a while and then give it up if you did n't like it, Mother.”

Even Strafford had to laugh at the simple-heartedness of this suggestion; and replied:—

“Oh, suppose I should advise her to give up working for Polander Brothers and set up a store of her own: do you think she could undo it all and go back after a year or two?”

“Or suppose he should recommend any other kind of suicide—mental, moral, material, or monetary—can suicide ever be undone?”

“Oh, but Dr. Strafford could n't ever recommend any kind of suicide.”

“Well; if he should, I want to be free to reject the advice.”

CHAPTER XIV.

DOCTOR AND PATIENTS.

ON his walk home Strafford said to himself: —

“How happy I am while I talk to her — and how miserable before I get through! Something must be done! I am beaten — routed — horse, foot, and dragoons. Why don't I fly? A month, or say three months, of absence may kill or cure — cure her, or kill me! Either would be better than this. There are commencement and class anniversary; old friends and new friends; dull times in railroad business and leave of absence easy to get; Balty to take care of the gray; money no object; splendid chance to get rid of my few remaining patients (all profitless), chance to catch a glimpse of all new scientific glimmerings and refresh my view of the old.”

His heart sank lower and lower within his breast as he recognized the fact that every possible consideration seemed to point toward his going.

“Then why don't I go?” He set his teeth together and answered, “By heaven, I will! Unless I can find some reason to the contrary!”

Despair seized him for her own. Fate, cruel fate, encompassed him like the Iron Shroud. In

vain he sought for some weak spot in the ranks of the reasons why he should fly from the dear, dangerous neighborhood of the fascinating widow — all, all were against him. He reached home more low-spirited than he had ever been in his life, groped his way in, and sat down in front of the window without even striking a light. Something obstructed the entering breeze — he arose to remove it — it was a pile of Phil's paraphernalia!

“Saved! Saved! Of course I cannot go! *How could Phil get on without me?*”

He hugged the dear old toil-worn books and papers to his breast and laughed aloud in his relief from the threatened heart-wrench. He had to go out and walk a mile or two to get the full benefit of his joy; and then came back and went to bed as happy as a reforming inebriate might be for whom his physician should prescribe whiskey.

Strafford, as time went on, devoted less and less of it to the practice of medicine. But as it happened, he had two strings to his bow. At his university he had been a “double first,” so far as proficiency in both physic and physics could make him so. Mathematics, both pure and (in some directions) applied, he had mastered before he turned to medicine and surgery. He had come West “to grow up with the country,” but what chance had a practitioner who was ahead of his time and place? Long before this he would have

sought more congenial fields, if it had not been for certain influences — strong though gentle and unconscious — which we can easily guess by what has been said in the earlier pages of this book.

Now it turned out to be all for the best that he had not quitted Springville. Railroad managers are not slow to recognize high qualities and high attainments, and he “struck his gait” (as they say of trotting-nags) when they made him chief engineer of the Springville road.

For various reasons, *some* of them at least personal to Phil himself, he quietly and as a matter of course charged himself with the boy’s future.

“Phil, my boy, what are you going to be?”

“Oh, Doctor — something not far from you, I hope!”

“My dear fellow, I’m with you there! But you cannot learn surgery in Springville — nor even medicine, decently.”

“No, I suppose not. And besides — I don’t believe I want to be a doctor. I’m afraid I could n’t trust myself.”

“How do you mean?”

“Oh, I’m a fool in one way. I never owned up to anybody before; but I am; a born fool.”

“Well that is doubted by some. If you say so, you ought to know best; but I never should have found it out any other way.”

“Oh, yes, you would, just as soon as you saw me have to meet with pain.”

“Can’t bear it?”

“Oh, I can bear it for myself, but I can’t bear

to see it in other people, nor in dumb brutes. I'm so chicken-hearted: to see a mother whipping a child and hear the child cry makes me sick! I can't fish because of the anguish of the worm when it feels the hook, and that quivering, one-sided motion of the fish's tail when the hook is being pulled out of its stomach. And the last duck I shot will be the last I ever will shoot; just because when the poor little beggar was sitting in the boat there, wounded, he shook the blood out of his eyes — *so* — while he watched me! Where should I find myself, as a doctor?"

"Poor boy!"

"Poor duck, I say! And in every dog-fight, no matter which dog licks, *I* get licked; just because I can't help siding with the under dog!"

"Well, well! But it is a doctor's business to relieve pain."

"Yes. But he must have common sense! He must be able to stand giving it as well as relieving it."

"Yes; and he must see a great deal that he knows cannot be cured, but must go on to the end."

"Ugh! Then I should want to put the sufferer out of his misery!"

"We do, sometimes."

"Do you? That's good! I thought that would be murder!"

"Well; we don't always tell of it. But, anyhow, I don't want you to be a doctor. What are called the "learned professions" are not so at-

tractive to me as they used to be. Physic and Law are good in one way—they bring you in contact with some studious men. And then as to profit. They are like finding spoons; a very good trade if you can only get enough to do at it, because it is *all profit*. But then, on the whole, I'd rather make spoons than find them ready-made. Railroading is already a trade: it will one day be a profession. What do you say to being a railroad man?"

"Oh, that sounds good!" cried the boy, snapping his fingers. "A surveyor?"

"Not exactly. An engineer, perhaps; but whether constructive or mechanical I leave you to say."

"Which will begin to pay me money first?"

"Have n't you all the money you want?"

"No-no, we have n't much."

"Do you want money for yourself, or for the family?"

"Why—for all of us, of course."

"Oh, you do, do you? You young—reprobate!" And he placed his hands on the boy's shoulders and looked in his eyes as if he wanted to kiss him. But he did not do it. "Well, suppose we combine the two. Work in the office with me on the profiles, and bridge and culvert drawings: and the plans for the shops, and when the shops are built you can go into them and get day-wages, and I can give you all the evening work you'll want to tie to."

"Splendid! When can I begin?"

"To-morrow."

"Glorious! and when will the pay begin?"

"In five weeks the pay-roll will come round, and you will be on it and paid with the rest!"

No use to attempt to depict the boy's hilarious delight, articulate and inarticulate, at the opening of the vista of manhood. Before it was over the two had reached the widow's gate and Strafford leaned upon it while Phil rushed in to tell the news.

Presently Anne appeared, and submitted to be dragged toward the gate by her impetuous son.

"We are all greatly indebted to you, Dr. Strafford. Won't you — come in?"

"Thank you; not to-day." And with a sigh he lifted his hat and walked off. He was trying to please Anne by doing what she had found it impossible to ask; restricting his visiting so as to silence gossip.

Hannerann liked to do her ironing in the open air, on an ironing-board laid across two barrels just outside Phil's window. One day as he was drawing inside, the thought suddenly struck him to ask about Dolly Dutcher (now Sanders), not directly, but as part of the local news of the old "Jimtown" locality.

"Oh, things is some changed tharaway by the railroad. O'man Hobbs — Hotpot Hobbs the' useter call him, 'n' lots o' wuss names, 'cause he were ollers a-quar'lin' 'n' a-fightin' everybody 'n' everythin', — he's sol' aout 'n' gone away up north on the G'leeny road: 'n' my o' man Balty's

brother Lucas he 's hired aout tew him 'n' went along ; 'n' Balty he got a letter fr'm him, a-askin' Balty t' sen' him s'm money t' come back on ; 'n' I upped 'n' tol' Balty t' let well enough alone, seein' 's haow tew 's company 'n' three 's a craowd in fa'm'ly matters ; but Balty he 's kinder soft-hearted, 'n' besides he kinder wanted t' show Luc haow well we wuz a-gittin' along ; 'n' so I put the' money in a letter ; six dollars it wuz, tew, — them six dollars I got fr'm yer mother — 'n' sent it ; but that 's the last we 've saw of th' money er him either, so I guess it 's all right arter all ; 'n' thar ye be ! See ? ”

Phil was appalled at the flood he had let loose by incautiously opening that gate, and kept silence, hoping the gate would turn out to be a self-closer. Vain thought !

“ Whilst I wuz a-writin' I jist upped 'n' tol' him all the news, haow Balty he 's a-workin' fer th' men th't cater-cornered up Hobbs's medder fer the railroad, 'n' I wuz a-workin' fer the folks of th' boy th't fooled his dog he set on th' surveyin' party, 'n' so it 's all right.”

“ Did n't Hobbs have a daughter or step-daughter or something of that kind ? ”

“ Oh, yes ; Dolly Dutcher, his wife's daughter, th't uster live t' ol' widder Tansey's ; she 's married th' storekeeper, Jim Sanders, 'n' so clum a heap sight higher ner anybody 'd ever 'a' thort fer, 'n' it 's jest spile't her — don't dew a hand's turn o' work ; 'n' thar ye be ! See ? Makes Jim jest hump hisself a-buyin' clo'es fer her ; 'n' when

I seed her a month 'n' more afore I come h'yer, 'n' tol' her whar I wuz a-comin', she upped 'n' 'llaowed she wished it wuz her; but I reckon she said it jest t' spite Jim, 'cause she wuz a-beggin' him t' sell aout his store 'n' go conductor on the railroad jest so 's she c'd go a-flyin' 'raound the kedntry 'n' not cost her a cent; 'n' then Jim he upped 'n' did it; 'n' thar ye be! See?"

"He was a fool to do it."

"War n't he jest? But I 'xpect he hed t' come tew it; fer Jim he dassent seem t' say his soul 's his own, seein' the' hain't hed no children, 'n' he hain't got no kind of a holt over her; 'n' thar ye be! See? Sometimes I'm kind o' sorry Balty 'n' me we hain't hed none, but mebbe it's all fer th' best." And she sighed.

A pause here occurred, a silence only broken by the sound of Hannerann's flatiron as it thumped the ironing-blanket or rubbed along over its yielding surface. For a while Phil cherished the idea that quietude was to be his portion for the rest of the afternoon. Scarcely! Listeners are too precious to be made so light of.

"I s'pose ye heered haow Zury Praouder he upped 'n' bort Burr Hobbses farm? Ye know Zury, don't ye?"

"No; I don't know him, but Dr. Strafford told me all about that."

"Wal, naow Zury's wife *she* 's upped 'n' died; 'n' thar ye be! See? No chick ner child t' leave noth'n tew; 'n' money 'n' farms jest a-pilin' in ontew him. But *then* — he 'll marry ag'in!

No danger o' him a-stayin' single — man like him, 'n' all the money he 's got, besides ! ”

The upshot of Phil's inquiries was — that he had to move his board to another window ; “ To get a better light,” as he explained to Hannerann ; she not knowing that he was speaking figuratively.

“ Well, Phil,” said Strafford one day, “ I guess the machinery department is the best route from bottom to top of the railroad ladder. What do you say ? ”

“ It suits me — but I should think that for other fellows there are quicker lines of promotion.”

“ Oh, you mean the fellows who work in the offices and never dirty their hands. Why, Phil, those men will grow gray at their desks. They will get a little advancement for a while ; increased pay from time to time ; but by and by they get into a niche where they stay world without end amen, while the practical men pass right by them. A draughtsman in the engineer department will think that road-bed, superstructure, bridges, and buildings are all in all. A man in the traffic department or the finance department will lose himself in figures ; and even the law department narrows a man's mind down to the legal, and equitable, and statutory rights and wrongs and remedies and relations — and all the other R's — but the fellow who is out on the road

keeps moving in more senses than one. He is better fitted on the whole for a superintendency than any of them. He is taking a longer run for a higher jump."

"Well, I'd rather work with things than with people, what little I've seen of them."

"Right you are. The mechanician is at least dealing with the forces of Nature; and she never lies, cheats, steals, or bears false witness — though she kills sometimes."

"Oh, of course you must n't trifle with her; but then you know just where you stand — or if you don't it's not her fault."

"Yes; Nature plays with all her cards spread out. But oh, how merciless she is! As some one has said, 'she puts in force against you all the rules of the game, whether you know them or not.'"

"Well; our business is to learn them."

"But we can't make everybody learn them; and many a poor fellow suffers and dies through some other fellow's crime or folly."

"Ugh!" said Phil. "There's the pity of it! It makes me shudder to think of it! Well — I can take care that no man is killed or maimed by my misdoing."

"Yes. I wish you might never be in any more danger from others than others will be in from you."

"Ugh!" and again he shuddered at the pity of it — as if somebody was walking over his grave.

The "repair shops" grew and improved until

they were capable of the crowning achievement — the building of a new locomotive engine. The first one was named "Strafford," and its god-father took Anne and Meg to see its launching upon the iron waves. They all shared to some extent Phil's thrill of delight; akin to the joy he had felt when he first observed the insignificant, babbling stream turning aside to move the ponderous mill-machinery, as it were with a playful movement of Nature's little finger, or the fluttering of a single hair of her majestic head.

This was a more refined, complicated, indirect display of her powers. A boiler-full of water; a fire-box full of wood; a handful of greasy cotton touched off with a match; later a bubbling, a rumbling, a hissing, a slow rising of the steam-guage; and lo! the inert mass of iron, steel, brass, and wood becomes a creature instinct with life, noise, motion, tremendous power for good — or evil.

When the "Strafford" had moved off and showed some of her paces to the admiring crowd, the little party went back into the shop and were shown the fiery forges; the strong, slow, exact drills and planing-lathes that furrow out solid iron as a plow furrows the yielding loam. Then they saw Phil at his familiar task; perched above their heads, handling the valve of a thousand-pound steam-hammer and making the huge mass dance up and down like a mote in a sun-beam; now striking a blow that shakes the elastic earth and makes the visitors tremble as they stand

afar off (to escape the showers of sparks), and then again another blow checked in its swift descent so that it would crack a robin's egg without crushing it.

At the first intermission in his task (while the shaft they were forging went back to the fire for another heat), Phil rejoined them, proud and gay, flushed with pleasant toil, and eager for their sympathy.

"Oh, Philip! My son! Come home! I don't like it!"

"Don't like it? It's glorious!"

"Oh, it's all too dangerous, too cruel, too strong, too hard, too heavy, too noisy, too rough, too dreadful! Do come home!"

"Come and pick flowers and learn to play the flute, shall I?"

"Oh, I don't know! I wish we did not love you so much."

"Well, I guess you won't, when you see me in the flower-picking and flute-playing business. But it will be a long time yet! Won't it, Meg?"

"Yes, of course. We don't really want you to be a girl-boy! But then—I think there are easier ways of being manly. There's the printing office—that's just as important as the railroad."

"Well, it's not in my line. Give me the hammer—you can have the pen and ink."

"I wish I could."

It is vain to offer many such details. We must

let the early years of Phil's teens go by with only a passing glance. He grew in strength of body and mind, never tall, but so proportioned that no one would notice his height; broad and deep in the chest, and spare and sinewy in the flanks. His level brows covered shining eyes that held the observer's look by their frank and sympathetic directness of gaze. A straight, strong nose joined in a fine curve with an upper lip so short that there was always a gleam of white teeth visible below it, even after a dark fringe of curly moustache shaded its rather full shape and rather too freshly cherry-like tint. The lower lip was firm — strong — wilful — and below it was a beautiful cleft chin; a direct inheritance from his mother; almost a birthmark. (Where his other traits came from no one knew.)

Phil was a member of the volunteer fire-engine company; quick at his post at tap of bell; strong and bold in action; silent in council; in short, one of those characters most prized in the community — fellows willing to work and not aspiring to office. Then when the company went off on target excursions, he was the crack-shot; when they put on boxing gloves in the engine-room he was "lightning with his hands;" and when there was a sick brother to watch or a dead one to bury, or a widow to be provided for, he was ready with his time, his strength, and his money.

CHAPTER XV.

COMME L'ESPRIT VIENT.

'As months and years progressed there came a time when it suddenly dawned upon the youth that women liked to look in his face — that when they met him walking with a companion, even with Strafford, *his* were the eyes their eyes met, not the other's. The next discovery (equally surprising) was that he was glad of it! Then followed the habit (when he was alone) of glancing backward after meeting a comely dame or damsel, to see if she had any lingering interest in him — the glance too often not fruitless, for in the untaught the emotions are undisguised.

Strafford might better, on the whole, have kept Phil with him in the less exposed, more cleanly business of the desk in the engineering department. To be sure the boy was never himself coarse of speech; but his fellows were; and there are very few of his sex who can keep clear of enjoyment of the fun which, unhappily, springs more lavishly from coarse wit than from the refined. Why is it, that from Juvenal to Offenbach, those shafts are most effectual that are poisoned with salt?

Phil grew, naturally, to depend less and less on

Strafford as his mind developed in the mechanical instead of the engineering line. But the doctor's untiring, unexacting friendship remained with all the dwellers in the cottage. It persisted so long and so openly (yet discreetly) that even gossip was tired out. Nobody talked about it any more, unless it might be some new-comer who was struck by it.

To the grinning or giggling questions of such an inquirer the better informed would reply:—

"Match? Naw!" (The *no* contemptuous is *naw*.) "Doc, he's lonesome; but he knows which side his bread's buttered on all the same."

"Don't you fool yourself. It ain't Doc that hangs back. It's the widder. She's tried it once, and once is enough fer a woman as smart as the widder McVey."

"Smart? You bet! She's jest as smart as they make 'em!"

"Well, anyhow, there ain't no match on."

"Not even a lucifer?"

"Naw: no lucifer ner no other kind. He might make up to the gal, ef she warn't so *all-fired* humbly."

"Jest as humbly as she is good; and that's sayin' a heap, *I* tell ye."

Now—not to put too fine a point upon it—Phil and Strafford did have something very like a falling-out.

One afternoon Strafford, thinking he had of late seen too little of Phil, strolled toward the machine shop to walk home from work with him.

He caught sight of the boy leaving the shop, and then missed him again. Could it be that he had slipped back on purpose to avoid the meeting? If so, the more reason for persistence. He soon found him.

"Well, Phil. Going home?"

"Yes, Doctor. Pretty soon. Not right away though. I just remembered one or two little things."

"Very well; I'll wait."

"Oh, I don't want to keep you waiting. I'll go now, if it's anything particular."

"Don't hurry. It's nothing particular."
("Only I want to know why you don't want to see me.")

"There; we'll go. It's all the same to-morrow."

They walked along talking in an uninteresting strain; and soon came in sight of a loitering female figure. The girl looked back at them and then resumed her walk more rapidly. As they passed her she lowered her parasol between them and herself.

"Miss Klatty, was n't that?"

"Yes; I guess it was Mattie Klatty."

After a pause Strafford asked, "Why did n't she want to be seen, I wonder?"

"Oh, I don't know." Then as if a sudden thought struck him, "I'll go back and find out." And before his companion could prevent he darted away.

Strafford purposely lingered in sight to compel

the young fellow to rejoin him, which he shortly did, blushing and laughing.

"She does n't let on that she saw us at all."

"Hum — ha. Girls are funny sometimes."

"Are n't they! Just try to pretend they're as innocent as blind mice!"

"They are — or ought to be."

"Oh, well — you know what I mean. They love mamma, they love papa, they love baby brother, they love Sunday-school, and all that. They never heard or dreamed of — the things *we* think about."

"Do you think Mattie Klatty ever did dream of such things?"

"Oh — there is n't enough of Mattie Klatty to be anything more than a child."

"But some other girls —?"

A low laugh was Phil's reply, and it struck Strafford's ears most painfully.

"Philip, Mattie is telling the truth and the other girls are lying — just pretending."

"Oh, come now, Doctor! You must remember you were young once yourself."

"I'm as young as I ever was in those matters. But I know more of the world, and I know women."

"You ought to, living in great, wicked cities as you have done."

"Small towns are more dangerous for boys of your age than great cities."

"Why — I thought the great cities were given over to all kinds of — dissipation."

"No. There you have your choice between the most alluring vices and the most charming virtues. Human nature is the same in both ; but then, my boy, purity is artificial ; and general cultivation is favorable to it."

"Are city people better than country people?"

"The cream of the whole world, to my thinking, is to be found among the very best men and women in a large city — just as the vilest and filthiest dregs are to be found in the bottom layer in the same place."

"Well — here's home. Don't you want to go in and see the folks?"

"And give you a chance to go back and make more of a fool of Mattie Klatty than she is by nature? No, sir ; I have n't done with you yet."

"Mattie Klatty is all right. What right have you to cast any slur on her?"

"Slur? Not I! I'm a friend of hers and her father's. I don't believe you wish to harm her — or to marry her. Come and walk with me a while: we have walked many a mile together."

Phil was silent and they walked on.

"To think the first of you would be to think you a dog ; and to think the last would be to think you a fool. She is innocent ; and she's very pretty, is n't she?"

"Mighty pretty, what there is of her."

"Well, now, how will she wear — how will she grow old, with those narrow, sloping shoulders, and that slim waist, and those baby hands and feet, and those baby thoughts and words?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"You want to know? *Just look at her mother.*"

"Oh Lord!"

"Oh Lord? I should think so! Fit mother for a puny girl, with a body the wind could blow away, and not wit enough to save herself from being fooled by a young fellow who doesn't care a rap for her; and lo, the mother a wreck, hunting about for doctors who are willing to prescribe morphine for her! There! I'm sorry I said that; it was unprofessional."

"Oh, never mind. It's no news."

"Well; but I ought not to have let it come through me. But you see, Phil, the fact is that I am so fond of you that I would strain a point to do you good."

Phil was touched by this, and replied: —

"Oh, I know you speak for my good. But I'm not thinking of marrying Mattie, or anybody else."

"No, and when you do think of anybody in that way, let it be a person full-grown in body and mind."

"A girl like myself." Again the disagreeable laugh.

"Heaven forbid!"

"Why — what's the matter with me?"

"Not much the matter with you; but a great deal the matter with any girl who should be like you."

"Is that a riddle?"

"No. It is a philosophic view of the difference

between the sexes. Do you think that a girl fit for you to marry is moved by the same impulses that we men are moved by?"

"Well — substantially."

"You are fooling yourself greatly, or somebody is fooling you — or both. Women marry from sentiment, respect, affection, love of courage, honesty, need of something to cling to, desire for support for their feeble bodies and souls."

"Is that all?"

"Well; love of children has something to do with it. And many other things — but not the baser passions."

Another disagreeable laugh.

"I believe, Philip, that somebody has been fooling you."

No reply.

"Now, I'll tell you another thing. In most cases where a woman shows the lower impulses, she does it for effect — pretends something that does not exist; that pretense having express reference to the wickedness and weakness of our masculine natures."

"Oh, Doctor, you're thinking of some of the high-bred society women — polished until nature is buried out of sight and hearing. But I guess that if you dig down through the polish you'll find us all about alike."

"The animal below the enamel, eh?" He walked on a few steps in silence. "Now I should not have expected to hear such a sentiment as that from your mother's son and your sister's brother."

Phil flashed and flushed in sudden wrath.

"What right have you to drag *them* in to such a talk as this?"

"The right of my love for you, and for them; and my wish, for all our sakes, that you should be set right."

"You have no right to drag them into such a talk as this!"

The foolish youth persisted in his anger. He made no perceptible sign of attention while Strafford tried to give him a sense of the high, chivalric esteem in which a gentleman holds every human being of the other sex; and he even entered the cottage gate heedless of his friend's good-night greeting.

"Am I too late?" thought Strafford. "Do I already see in his face the absent-minded, bored, secretive, cynical expression that marks the sensualist when dealing with persons and things not sensual?"

"Well — perhaps he has met some of the lower and baser specimens of the other sex. I wish I had tackled him before! I wish I had opened his eyes to one branch of pathology!"

"But I'm sure of one thing — Phil could never be false and cruel. His soft heart could never meet the look of a wronged, betrayed girl — a look like that a pet lamb might give to its master and playmate after he had cut its throat."

So there was a coolness between them. As its basis could not be mentioned between Strafford

and Anne, he rather avoided the house for a time, in order that it might not be too prominent ; but not long after this Phil was promoted from the position of apprentice in the shop to the more lucrative one of fireman on an engine, so that one half his nights were spent away from home — another unfortunate condition of things for him — and Strafford could easily time his visits to the evenings when the women were alone.

Anne soon found a chance to question her friend about his quarrel with her son.

“ Oh — you must ask Phil about that.”

“ I have ; and his answers — still more his evasions — alarm me beyond measure.”

“ Phil will come out all right, I think.”

“ Are my suspicions — my fears — well grounded ? ”

“ What direction do they take ? ”

“ Just the one direction which you and I cannot talk about.”

His silence confirmed her apprehensions. Her distress did not manifest itself in tears ; she showed it unconsciously in the “ trick ” characteristic of her — the right hand supporting the left elbow, while the fingers of her left hand tapped nervously and audibly upon her teeth ; her foot beating the carpet at the same time.

After watching her a while in admiring and pitying silence, Strafford said : —

“ You *thought* you were doing your best for him.”

She recalled her eyes from their far-away look and answered : —

"I have done my best — ever since he was born — but the sword hangs over us all."

"You gave him a good heart."

"Oh, what have I given him! What have I not given him!"

"You might have given him a shield against that sword."

"What shield?"

"You might have given him — you might still give him — a second father."

"When his own father — Ah bah! Must selfishness crop out even in *your* relations with *my* son?"

"Yes; I confess it. When my interests, and yours, and his, all point so evidently toward one thing, why should I keep silent only because I am the most interested party?"

"Leave my interests out, and confess that you are asking me to sacrifice myself for yours and his!"

"Sacrifice yourself, Anne!"

"Yes — do what my better nature protests against."

"Marrying me would be doing this, dear Anne?"

"Yes, it would, dear George! Now you have made me cry, and I shall look like a fright, but what do I care?"

Very carefully and distantly he gained permission to hold her hand and dry her tears, and then they talked themselves into the hope that Phil could be made safe by other means than giving him a step-father.

When it was time for Meg to come in from prayer-meeting, Anne prepared to break up the confidential confab. Lifting her hand (still held in his) toward his lips, she said : —

“Now, George, take the pledge, so that we can be brother and sister forever.”

“My darling, my one love, would it be a comfort to you?”

“Oh, yes! An inexpressible comfort. That disquieting thought I could then dismiss from my mind.”

“I will not hesitate at any sacrifice of myself, where your comfort is concerned.” And he kissed her hand. The subject of marriage was at an end between them.

“Oh, how good you are!” she said. Then she kissed his hand and all was settled.

When Meg came, she easily saw that whatever subject they had been talking about was dropped because she came. Her first impulse was to make some excuse to absent herself; her second was to summon up courage and introduce *her* subject.

So, bold as a dove, she began : —

“I don’t know what you’ve been talking about; but perhaps it’s the same thing I am going to talk about — I hope it is.”

“Whatever interests you interests us, my sweet one.”

“Well” — (she had to swallow a lump in her throat) “it is about Philip and the company he keeps.”

“The very thing!” said Strafford. “How in the world did you hit upon it, Margaret?”

"Oh, I don't know! It just — came to me. I think an angel must have whispered it; because all prayer-meeting I have been thinking of it."

"Surely it was an angel, my daughter; or a saint — Saint Margaret."

"Do you know anything about Phil's companions?" asked Strafford.

"No — except what foolish girls say; girls who wish him to be attentive to them, and he will not. I don't know who they are, but I know who they are not, as they used to be; his mother — and his one best, *bestest* friend on earth." She lifted her eyes shyly to Strafford's face, and let them drop again quickly.

After a long silence Margaret said suddenly: —

"Oh, why is n't he religious?"

"It would be a great safeguard," said Strafford; and Anne agreed with him.

"Then he shall be!" said the enthusiastic girl. "There is an awakening of interest just now; Mr. Blank, the revivalist, is coming; there will be a great saving of souls — why not Phil's among the rest? Oh, such prayers as I will offer! and you all must. They can *not* be unheard — it would be a sin to doubt!"

"Well, Meg, you may be sure of my doing all I can; and your mother too, I am confident. But if I were you I would try the more worldly-wise way to keep him out of bad company."

"How is that?"

"Try to keep him in good company. Make him go out with you to every little gayety that offers."

"Oh, I always do that. I cultivate society for his sake entirely."

"Not for your own?"

"No, I am not a social success."

"No? Why not, if I may ask? Are you too proud to come down to this provincial level?"

"Proud, indeed!" she cried with a little laugh.

"No one is so humble as I am. But there is a reason which I need not tell; everybody can see it for himself."

"Leave me out, please; for I am quite at a loss."

"Well — never mind."

After she bade him and her mother good-night, she sat long in her room; wondering, wondering if he *really* could never have noticed her lack of good looks. How happy she was at the mere possibility of such a thing; and how — grateful to him!

In girls like Meg, "ungainly," every little passing grace is lost; every little contretemps is ungracefully burlesqued. Little children, and their fathers and mothers, set great store by her; as did also her girl companions, to whom she was an unfailing friend and never a rival. Who so kind, so able and willing to help? Kitchen or parlor, picnic or quilting-bee, wedding or funeral — 't was all one: if Meg McVey was there, there could be no failure.

But when on any social occasion the "pairing-off" time came, and partners were chosen; the inferior, weak, helpless, artful, giggling girls were

sure to be taken, and the superior, strong, helpful, artless, serious Margaret to be left. Even if by chance any young fellow fell to her share, her very certainty of not being able to please destroyed any chance of pleasing.

Sometimes, before going into company, as she gave a last look at her glass, she would say to herself: —

“I wonder if I am not a little less plain than usual to-night!”

Then, an hour or so later: —

“Oh, pshaw! It's of no use!”

She knew that the men were all (except Dr. Strafford of course) beneath her standard; but could she help wishing that they were not? Sometimes she would make a little effort to be frivolous; would try to talk nonsense and laugh at nothing, like the other girls — all the while studying her ungallant gallant with a wistfulness that was half quizzical and half pathetic. And then when she saw that, while pretending to attend to her, his eyes were fixed elsewhere, she would dismiss him speedily — almost brusquely — and take refuge with her mother or somebody else who loved her. Without love she could not live. She wished everybody would love her! It was not much she asked; it was only that people would crave her society, her help, her sympathy, her affection. Most people did; why should young men be the exception? She did not want them to marry her, — would not marry any one of them, — but she wished they would treat her with

cordial attention as they did other girls; would "be good" to her.

"She's too good for them," said Phil to himself; but he raged inwardly all the same. He would make her try little expedients of coquetry which were weapons of force in the hands of other girls — ways of dressing hair (only hers would never lie down to be dressed), bits of feminine adornment or what not. On her they always looked — somewhat as they would look on Phil! He never tired of bringing to her things like those which his own fair enslavers had flaunted at him with great confidence. Margaret would look wistfully at them, go to the mirror, put them to their appropriate use, and say, with a smile and a sigh: —

"Oh, yes! They become me — like a bump on a log."

She would not have minded being an old maid; only, in that uncultivated community, old maids were a marked class, and were in a great measure shut out from general sympathy and social joys. In rude life it is, to this day, as it was in Bible times; childlessness is a "shame," and the position of a single woman is to a certain degree one of isolation and mortification. Meg had never seen "good society," and could not know that one of its most unfailing characteristics is the honorable and distinguished place it reserves for the unmarried of her sex. In the best, purest, most elevated, most educated, most cultivated of all social circles the maiden sisters of the married,

and the maiden aunts of the young folks are recognized as the heart of charity, the right hand of benevolence, the soul of religion ; and they are cherished accordingly. But this our dear Meg could not know. So instead of feeling happy and hopeful, she could only be resigned and resolute.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REVIVAL.

SPRINGVILLE, like all young Western towns built up chiefly by Northern migration, was extremely religious in its outward aspect; and, so far as its best and leading element was concerned, sincerely pious and orthodox. Anne conformed to all their ways — church-going, Sabbath-keeping, and such things, though she repelled all inquiries as to the “state of her soul.” Meg, during her early, docile years, was with them in thoughts and words, as well as in conduct. Phil held more aloof. In truth, he and Strafford were privately classed together as “Free-thinkin’ scienters, like most o’ them book-readin’, star-studyin’, calc’latin’, city ducks.” “Ye-es, — devotin’ precious time to the geology of this fleetin’ sphere, ’stead of the theology of all eternity!”

Phil soon began to perceive that a “dead set” was being made upon him, to bring him “under the influence” — threats, persuasions, promises, even tears.

“Oh, yes, — I’ll go with the rest of you to meeting — prayer-meeting, praise-meeting, camp-meeting, gospel - meeting, experience - meeting, monthly concert of prayer, love-feast, revival; —

anything and everything! And I'll sing and go through all the motions — be baptized and vaccinated just as lief as not — but as to taking out my heart and casting it at the foot of the throne, why, I ain't made that way. It's inside my ribs where I can't get at it. Pray for me? Oh, yes, all you like. I'm perfectly willing to be convicted and converted; only I won't say I am when I am not. Hard heart? Yes, I dare say, but if the Lord can't soften it, I can't. Misery of the unregenerate soul? Stuff! My unregenerate soul is as happy as the day is long. It does n't even mind your bothering me this way. Go ahead — do so some more."

Indeed, it was far from painful to have the fair young missionaries laboring with him. They prevailed not at all to his salvation, albeit greatly to his delectation; seeing that to natures like his the rustle of a skirt is always interesting. At the same time his courage, industry, temperance, good ability, and good looks made him a shining mark for feminine blandishments.

"Going to prayer-meeting to-night, Phil?"

"Oh dear! Well, just as you say, Meg. If you want to go, I'm right on it."

"I don't care to go to-night. Why don't you take Mattie Klatty and go?"

"Why does n't Jack Klatty take you and go?"

"Oh — because I'm not pretty, I suppose. But that's no reason why you should n't take Mattie."

"Not pretty? Humph! Well, if you think

I'm going to wait on Jack's sister any more than Jack waits on mine, you're fooled, that's all. I'll either go to meeting with you, or I'll take my lantern and go to the shop."

"Oh Phil! I should just die of shame if anybody thought you tried to force other young men to—to be attentive to me! Let them do as they like; what do I care?"

"All right; we'll stick to each other."

"Well, but—I want you to go to-night. Would you mind taking Mattie, just to please me?"

"Love to please you, Meg, but if Jack Klatty does n't want to please my sister Meg, I don't want to lay myself out much to please his sister Mattie. Not sister-matically, as it were."

"Atrocious! That is one of your very worst."

"Sorry you don't appreciate my little efforts to amuse. Now wouldn't you have been more pleased if Jack Klatty"—

"Oh, pshaw! I'm so pleasant already that I don't need pleasing. And if I did, Jack Klatty could n't please me. But, Phil—I half promised Mattie for you."

"I suppose you want me to be converted."

"Oh, if you only would!" And she threw her arms around his neck from behind and pulled his face within kissing reach.

"Well, well. There, there, Meg; I'll go, of course."

Conversion, in Phil's business, meant the carburization of iron; the change whereby it becomes

steel. He knew it as a long, slow process, demanding much labor, fuel, and time. A few years later, after the Bessemer inspiration was perfected, he would have known about *conversion* also as an almost instantaneous operation, the metal being fused in fervent heat and then suddenly, by a mighty blast of wind, blown out of its old condition into something better.

Now the two "*conversions*" known to the religious world bear the same relation to each other that exists between these two processes of metallurgy. The deliberate, commonplace reform of character and change of views, motives, and purposes is the one; the white heat, the wild ebullition of uncontrollable emotion, the other.

The latter was the phenomenon required and desired among the people with whom Phil and Margaret associated. A great "Revival" was in progress, and "Shouters" were relieving their own feelings and disturbing the feelings of others at the meetings, by cries of "Hallelujah!" and "Glory, glory!" and groans of "Amen;" and dozens of other thrilling words, slogans in their hard-fought battle with the devil. To them it was a "precious season," a "glorious outpouring of the Holy Spirit." "Seekers" were sought for and urged forward to the "anxious seat" or "mourner's bench," by zealous friends. Meetings were held at morning, noon, and night for eight days, two of which were Sundays, under the auspices of Brother Blank, the great revivalist, who was hired for the occasion.

So Phil escorted pretty Mattie, she flutteringly happy, and he in a rather grim mood. The revivalist was staying at the Klattys', and they all walked over together. When Phil was introduced to him, Brother Blank asked, in a business-like tone : —

“Saved, Brother McVey?”

“Well — you'd better ask somebody else about that,” said Phil, somewhat nonplussed and offended.

“Nathan said unto David, ‘Thou art the man.’ Nobody but you is on *your* road to Hell or to Glory, as the case may be.”

Phil maintained his silence, and Mattie's treble took up the theme.

“No, Brother Blank, he is not; and many of his friends set great hopes on your influence, you are such a great revivalist.”

“Oh, no, Sister Klatty, I am not, responded the minister, thus easily led off to an egotistical line of thought. “You must be thinking of Brother Pratt. He is the most favored of the servants of the Master. He is, I believe, on his twenty-sixth thousand saved. I am only on my seventh.”

“Twenty-six thousand dollars?” asked Phil, quite innocently; though as soon as he had said the words he knew by the convulsive shaking of Mattie's arm in his that he had made some laughable blunder.

Brother Blank replied with some asperity, as though suspecting a sarcasm : —

“Twenty-six thousand sinners saved, young man! So many souls brought to a sense of their lost and naked condition and washed in the Blood of the Lamb and clothed upon with righteousness! Dollars are but filthy rags!” and he tapped his own well-filled pocket-book to indicate that his dollars were filthy rags like the rest; and people must not imagine for a moment that what they gave him was any equivalent for what he gave them. In truth, he was no hypocrite or self-seeker. He believed he was doing God service as firmly as he believed his own existence; and also that he as a laborer was worthy of his hire. And so he was; whether we agree with his methods or not we must all admit that temperance, probity, purity, and industry are among the results of the godliness spread abroad by him and his kind.

The meeting was admirably managed. No halts and pauses in which those engaged could look about them and start questionings; one thing followed another like the scenes and situations in a good play. Ringing hymns wherein everybody could and did join; bright speeches adapted to call forth the inspiring shouts which take the place of applause in such cases; wildly fervent prayers, during which the volunteer responses were almost agonizing in their intensity; Scripture readings, so-called, in which the leader would call out chapter and verse; open the book and read a verse or two, and then go on from memory, looking about from face to face among his hearers,

and finally would slam down the book as a useless incumbrance, and roll forth the familiar words as if then and there inspired to give them utterance for the first time on earth.

Brother Blank knew his business well, and from long experience could avoid errors, and produce effects little short of miraculous. He did not disdain the use of humor to give point and piquancy to solemnity. He knew how and when to choke off incongruous things. At a glance he could perceive when one poor ill-balanced old soul who had been "saved" at every revival since she was eight years old (and occasionally lost between-times), was getting beyond her small modicum of self-control and about to break out in absurd rantings; and he would then start a many-versed hymn, during which he sent some trusty friend to attend to her case and gently but firmly sent her home under escort.

The meeting was in a great tent. As Brother Blank walked up the aisle among the gathering and murmuring hundreds, he started "I'm glad salvation's free," a favorite hymn with a rousing chorus. Then when he faced his audience and the tune came to a close, he said:—

"Oh, the blessedness of this place! I don't want any better ascension robe when I die than a piece of this grand old tent! When God shall tell the trumpeter Gabriel to inflate his lungs with the pure air of heaven and give a blast on his horn, the moss-covered tombstones will begin to totter, and I shall go up with the rest with a

piece of this tent wrapped about me, and I shall change it for a white robe and sit down at the feet of the Lamb. Oh, glorious feet! Oh, glorious Lamb! Brother Alpha will now lead us up in front of the Great White Throne in prayer."

Then followed singing again; and then Bible-reading — recitation, rather; next came the test of the whole matter: the invitation to sinners to "come forward." The most earnest of the old converts went up and down the open spaces urging friends by name to arise and seek the blessing. Not merely church missionaries; but business men — merchants, bankers, lawyers — one judge of court — joined in the work, with pleadings, smiles, and even tears.

"Come, Brother Harper! Come, Sister Sprague! Come! You don't know how much better you'll feel when you've laid your burden of sin at the foot of the cross! Now is the accepted time! Now is the day of salvation! Get behind the Blood! Come *now* and get behind the Blood! You may not see another sunrise — this may be your last chance to make your choice between the golden streets of Heaven and infinite ages of torment in the pit! The seething lake of fire and brimstone where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched!"

Some seventeen responded and went forward to the "anxious seat," a bench set just in front of the platform, where they knelt down to be prayed for and to pray. Among them were three little boys. Said Brother Blank: —

"You know when the prodigal son came home and they were rejoicing over his return, his brother complained to the old man that he had never given him even a kid to make merry with. But, glory to God! he has here given us several kids to rejoice over."

All this passed over Phil as the shadow of a cloud over a rock; but he could hear Mattie sobbing at his side. Before the prayers for the "mourners" were begun, an invitation was given to all who felt the burden of sin, but could not bring themselves to throw it off, to rise in their places. Several rose, and were instantly surrounded by praying, smiling, encouraging, assisting friends, who almost carried them bodily to the front. Then an invitation was given to all who had beloved friends on whom they wished an outpouring of the spirit that they might be moved to seek for peace, to rise. Many rose — among the rest Mattie Klatty. Her friend Brother Blank singled her out, and asked if it was the dear young friend and brother at her side for whom she asked help in his helplessness and light in his darkness. She bowed and knelt down. Then prayers wildly fervent were offered for him and the others. "O Lord Jesus come now — COME NOW, in thy bodily presence as of old, right in among us here in the tabernacle! Melt the hearts of the stubborn! Restore peace to the penitent! Shed thine own effulgent glory on the black midnight of sin and sorrow and the blindness of the scoffer!"

Mattie arose from her knees and gently pushed Phil toward the aisle; and he, thinking she wanted to go home, started toward the door; but she caught him and pulled him in the opposite direction toward the platform, whither he refused to be led. Shouts and cries, prayers and sobbings, were resounding from side to side and from end to end of the assemblage, so that this little incident was scarcely noticed by anybody; but the poor girl thought everybody had seen her attempt and her cruel failure; and this feeling, added to her disappointment, the over-wrought state of her nerves, and the effect of the now foul and vitiated atmosphere of the place, was too much for her — she dropped back in her seat and fainted away.

Phil was for picking her up like a doll and carrying her home; but no! This kind of thing was what the fervent ones were looking for. It was a “manifestation of the Power!” Several of both sexes, who were not occupied at the moment in saving themselves or others, gathered around her to tell her how to cast off her sins and get relief. She lay back limp and helpless; her eyes half closed, her hands nervously clutching at invisible somethings. Her breathing was short and labored, and sometimes almost stopped. One sister held her shoulders and head, while another vigorously wielded a fan — a third tried to hold her hands, and all were fluently offering advice.

“Give up everything!”

“Put your whole trust in Him!”

“Accept Him now!”

Finally a lady sensibly suggested that Mattie should be taken out of doors.

“Come out into the fresh air. Now let me tell you: sometimes people can’t believe where the air is warm and close, and if they go out where it is pure they can believe right off. Isn’t that so?”

This question was addressed to one of the sisters who was holding Mattie, in a tone which indicated that the asker was not quite sure of the soundness of her doctrine. The sister did not indorse it, and the sympathetic author of the suggestion looked as if she thought she had made a mistake.

Phil hovered about the outside of the group, thoroughly uncomfortable and disgusted with the whole affair. If it had been his sister or his mother, he would have braved everything — elbowed all aside and carried her into some more wholesome atmosphere, moral and physical; but this young girl friend he could not interfere with, he thought, though afterward he was sorry he had not done so.

At last she opened her eyes and moaned, “Oh, Meg! Where’s Meg? Phil, where’s Meg?”

“She’s at home Mattie. Do you want her?”

“Oh, yes, I want Meg!”

“I’ll run and bring her to you in a minute.”

“Oh, no — don’t leave me here, let me go too.”

And she tried to rise, but swayed forward and sidewise almost to the floor. Phil took advantage

of the movement and lifted her, bodily, her head on his right shoulder and her poor little helpless, insensible feet threatening to kick in the face all the people sitting at his left as he strode out.

The fresh air soon brought back her consciousness, but finding herself quite comfortable she did not "let on," and only "came to," with miraculous suddenness and completeness, when Phil needed one of his hands to open the gate at the cottage.

"Well!" said Meg, when she met them. "What kind of a time have you had?"

"Oh, a soul-revivin', sin-killin' old time," said Phil.

"You ought to have been there, Meg," said Mattie. "It was a great outpouring. Lots were convicted and I suppose will find peace — but I got sick and had to come away."

"Was Phil" —

"Was I convicted? Oh, you better believe it! I felt the burden of sin; but as it was n't very heavy, I brought it home and set it down at the gate. *That's it.*" And he pointed at Mattie.

"Yes, Meg. I'm the only burden of sin he felt the weight of, after all!"

"How was it?"

"Why, you see, I introduced Phil to Brother Blank as you and I agreed, and Brother Blank told him how he'd saved goin' on seven thousand; and Phil asked him if he meant dollars, and that made me laugh so 't I was 'most used up before we got into the meeting at all. And I believe you did it on purpose to make me laugh, Mr. Phil McVey!"

"Never thought of such a thing! I would n't insult the man willingly! Why should I? He never did me any harm, but caught the mice in father's barn." (This was a mere spontaneous falling into poetry — not any reflection on the minister's taking ways.) "'Course I know we paid him by the day and not by the dozen!"

"Well, any way, what with laughing, and holding in so Brother Blank should n't know it, I was half dead when we went in. And the singing and the noise! Of all the grand experiences you ever saw that was the beater! I got up, as you and I agreed, when friends was to be prayed for, and then I knelt down and prayed my best, as if for a miracle to happen. And when I thought I *must* have been heard, I tried to get Phil to go forward with me. And — and — he — he — he would n't!" And the poor little thing cried again.

"Well, never mind, Mattie! The next time I go to prayer-meeting with you, I'll go up!"

"Will you? Honest?"

"Yes. The very next time!"

"To-morrow night?"

"Oh, no; to-morrow night I'll be off on my run."

"Well, then! Some time! Now I was going to tell you, Meg. The air was pretty good low down while I was kneeling; but when I stood up and we moved out in the aisle, I started toward the pulpit and he started toward the door. I could n't hardly breathe, and first thing I knew,

I did n't know anything! Then they all thought I'd felt the power and was under conviction! But when I come to, I just asked for you, dear; and Phil carried me all the way here, don't you think!"

"Oh, yes! He could have carried you clear to Chicago if he had wanted to!"

"Could he? I wish he had!" said the little coquette. "Oh, no, I don't either, because I should have had to walk back by myself while he ran off after somebody else! Well, now I must get home, for if Brother Blank gets home before me they'll think I'm a lost lamb indeed."

"Come, Meg; walk along with us," said Phil.

"Oh, no, I'm sure Meg is too tired!"

"Nonsense; I know it will do her good."

So Meg had to go, largely diminishing the consolation yearned for by pretty Mattie, who was slow to forgive Phil for all his slights.

They met the minister at the Klattys' gate. Cried he:—

"Seventeen sinners saved to-night! Fourteen saved last night and five the night before! Oh, Hallelujah! My friends, what a glorious record is that!"

As Phil and Meg walked home he said to her,—

"If you ever catch me in such a hole again, I'll give you leave!"

"Why, Phil?"

"Oh, it's just an open lunatic asylum, full of volunteer lunatics!"

"Now, Phil! But you promised Mattie to

take her, and go up to the mourner's bench with her!"

"Not much, I did n't! What I promised was that *when* I next went with her, I'd go up to the mourner's bench. So I will — go up and stand on it — stand on my head right in the middle, and kick my heels together and crow."

"I'm afraid the seat of the scornful is your only place."

"I hope so."

CHAPTER XVII.

PROMOTION FOR PHIL.

ONCE more Strafford sought Phil at the shop at "quitting-time," after the latter had got in and cleaned his engine.

"Philip, I want to have a talk with you, on business."

Phil had a sore spot in his conscience that had been rankling almost ever since their rupture; a remorseful consciousness of injustice, ingratitude, incivility, insolence — every bad and brutal and mortifying thing that begins with *in*.

"Oh, Doctor," he began; and had to stop to swallow a lump in his throat.

"Well, my dear boy?"

"I know I was wrong. I always am — at least when I differ with you."

"Never mind that, my boy."

"But I do mind it. I don't suppose you ever felt as I have, because you never made such a fool of yourself."

"Why, Phil, a greater fool than I have sometimes made of myself does n't live — could n't live, because his folly would rise up and strangle him."

"Well; mine did n't strangle me, but I'll tell

you what it did do ; it made me feel as if I could take a coupling-pin and beat a long, deep, jagged hole in the side of my head ! ”

“ Ha-ha-ha ! Do you have that feeling, too ? I did n't know any one did but myself. Mine has oftener come when I have made myself ridiculous than when I have done a real wrong ; and there are some old blunders of mine that to this day I want to expiate by beating in the side of my skull with the end of a brick ! ”

“ Say, Doctor ; are you ever tempted to wish all the people who knew of your folly were dead ? ”

“ I 'm afraid so. ”

“ Well, then, we are alike ! Alike in those little ways, I mean ; not alike in sense and goodness. If we had been, I should not have behaved so badly to you — my friend, if ever a man had a friend ! ”

“ There, there, my dear fellow. Drop that, or you 'll make me feel ashamed. What I wanted to speak to you about was — money. You 're a man, to all intents and purposes ; a better engine-driver than the man that 's over you, and yet we haven't an engine for you, and no prospect of one. ”

“ Yes. I would n't cut out old Hiram, if I could. ”

“ Fact is, between you and me and the post — ours is a one-horse railroad. ”

“ Yes ; I 've found that out. It 's a 'dog-tail railroad,' as they say around here. A line that

starts from a place of no consequence and runs nowhere.”

“It does what it was built to do — the work that was done by common country teaming before it was built. We have nothing to regret, only our field is narrow. But that’s not to the point. What is to the point is this: the Chicago and Galena road needs just such men as you are — needs one now.”

“Business is different up there, I suppose.”

“Yes! When a prairie schooner comes to *our* east end, she can sail right on without our help; but when a lake schooner gets to Chicago she must unload, and somebody else must do the rest of the carriage westward.”

“I see. But, Doctor, how do you know they want me?”

“The superintendent wrote me so.”

“I believe you asked him.”

“Well — if I did, I don’t want anybody to know it except you and me.”

“Oh, Doctor — why did I ever — where’s there a coupling-pin! I *must* pound my head just a little!” and he took off his cap and gave some resounding cracks with his knuckles on his hard, firm brainpan.

“Did I not ask you to drop that? I did; and I meant it. There was probably wrong — or at least mistake — on my part as well as yours.”

“But I am so awfully indebted to you; and getting more so! That is what poisons my memory of” —

"Now, now! *Will* you drop it? The Strafford-McVey account current shows a huge debit balance; but it is on the other side from the one you have in your mind. Nothing I can ever do will square it up. As to this new suggestion; I have just one stipulation to make, and that is that no step shall be taken without your mother's free consent."

"Oh, indeed! Not get an engine of my own? Well; of course she won't object to a thing like that!"

"Well; then you can safely promise to leave it to her."

"Oh, see here, Doctor! She might hang back for a while from parting with her owny dony boy, and then get reconciled to it afterward."

"All right. When she is reconciled, then it shall be done."

"But of course she would be reconciled sooner if I were to go off — on trial, say, for a while; so that they could get used to it gradually."

"Do you *want* to leave them?"

"I want to get my engine."

"No consequence whether your mother and sister are glad or sorry?"

"I am wild to step on to the footboard."

"You don't even care whether or not they blame me for the separation?"

"Oh, just let me get hold of the lever once and I'll make that all right."

"You 'll never do it by my help without their consent."

"You 'll hold me back?"

His face fell into the hard, level, fierce lines that so frightened his mother whenever she saw them. But he had his match this time.

"Put it any way you like. What you do without their consent, you do without mine."

The youngster's blood was up, and with any other opponent than Strafford he would have been ready for a full-grown quarrel.

"You said at first that I was almost a man."

"Well."

"Well, do men have to be controlled by the women — and by other men who side with the women?"

"Of course they do. There is no magic in the twenty-first birthday, or in the "freedom suit," or in the cloudy, wavering line that divides boyhood from manhood — divides without separating."

"I can make the line sharp enough whenever I like."

"Now remember your failing."

"What's my failing?"

"Saying things you've got to repent of."

"All right. I'll look out for that."

"Don't lay out any more of the coupling-pin business for your brainpan than you can help."

"Oh, no doubt, you've got me tight, where I can't wiggle. If I don't sing your tune I can't get my engine."

"Philip, I've got you tighter than that would hold you. I've got your heart, and soul, and conscience on my side. All I have to do is to turn

your thoughts to two — two — women, facing the hard world with only one natural ally of the stronger sex ; and then show you that one person — pride of their hearts, whether he deserves it or not, — setting up his separate selfishness and saying, ‘ you go your way and I will go mine.’ What would you say to the fellow ? ”

“ Say he was a cuss, I guess.”

“ I’m sure you would ! You’d say he must be the son of some other woman than *your* mother.”

“ Well, I guess I was n’t changed in my cradle to any great extent. My mother never went back on anybody ; and as for Meg, she is mother over again for faithfulness, only more so, if possible. I’ll ask them, and then we’ll see. Or — good idea ! Suppose you ask them ! ”

Strafford made a sound such as one might utter if his best friend had stood on his best corn, and he was trying to suppress his feelings : a kind of groan with the lips tight shut : “ mmmmm ! ”

“ Well — ‘ I dare do all that may become a man ! ’ I’ll do it.”

So to him fell the task of unfolding the plan to the McVeys.

“ Phil to leave us ? ” asked Anne — and there was danger in her eye. “ I should like to know what you mean, Dr. Strafford ! ”

“ I mean you to have the choice of his going or staying.”

“ But you mean to say he ought to go : I am sure you do ! ”

"*Please* not put words into my mouth."

"Perhaps you might not be so anxious to get rid of him if you knew that where he goes we follow."

"I hope I am man enough not to let that make any difference. I could never, *never* look you — any of you — in the face again if I had suppressed this for fear of suffering a personal loss."

"Very well, sir. I am glad to find out how little of a loss it will be."

Strafford was silent; and after a wondering pause, Meg intervened; her voice shaking at first, but gaining strength as she went on.

"But Mamma — dear Mamma — what can you be thinking of?"

"Of things you know nothing about, my love, and need not know anything."

"Perhaps I don't know, and perhaps I do. But I never saw you like this before — hardly ever."

"You never saw me threatened with the loss of my son — by one professing friendship."

"*Professing* friendship? 'The best friend we three ever had in the world!'"

"No, no, Margaret. I owe you, you three, all, more than I can ever repay," cried Strafford.

"And he comes and offers a chance that is wonderful for so young a person as Phil, and only asks you to take it or not as you like."

"Thank you, Meg. You say the truth, though I should not have dared to say it."

"Oh, Margaret dares say anything to me. I'm

only her mother!" (A pause) "There, there, dear: don't cry. I did not wish to hurt your feelings — but you don't know the selfishness of men's hearts, and I hope you will never learn. Now come here and let me forgive you!"

"Oh, I'm not sorry for what *I* said. I'm sorry for what *you* said. So will you be when you think it over; and then *I'll* forgive *you*." And she left the room.

A silence.

"Well, Anne?"

"No, Dr. Strafford; not well at all. Do you fancy that my son's being out of the way would make any difference favorable to you? Would help your silly, persistent, impossible suit in the least?"

"Oh, I've not made up my mind about that. It might be better — and it could n't be worse." He sighed hopelessly.

"Just set your mind at rest. It could n't be worse than it is, and it cannot be better, *ever*."

"What wanton cruelty! I've given you no cause — it must be just love of giving pain!"

"Remind you of a Comanche torturing a prisoner, or something of that sort?"

"N-o; not a general, natural, probable, customary, to-be-expected, *ethnic* savagery like that."

"What then?"

"Oh, a kind of perverse, exceptional individual hatefulness, that prompts the wanton giving of pain to the helpless."

"Well, now" —

"Wait a minute, please, till I give you an illustration. A stout fellow wanted to get rid of a child who loved him." (Anne laughed.) "So he held it down and put out its eyes one by one. Then he let it go and laughed as it stumbled away, blinded and screaming. Laughed as you are laughing now."

"Ugh! What a fiendish imagination! Don't you know that there is such a thing as kind cruelty?"

"Yes. Every surgeon must know that."

"Well—I am your surgeon—my tongue is my knife."

"It is—not a dull one."

"You compliment me. Are you cured?"

"Not in the least. Let it teach you how deep the affection is, that you would have to cut out my heart itself to eradicate it."

"Affliction did you say?"

"No, indeed! Affliction to you, I suppose: or infliction—which is it?"

"Oh—neither. In fact, if I were half as cruel as you fancy, I should rather enjoy it."

"Anne! My queen of love! Be cruel and let me be fooled forever! To love you, even hopelessly, is my life!"

"No, sir! The reason why I hurt you is because I have a conscience. I might say—if you would n't misunderstand me—because I love you, *brother George*, in my elder-sisterly fashion. Now you might much better let my hand alone! (all inky, too!). What did you promise?"

"Have I broken my promise?"

"You are breaking it now, you know you are!"

"No; I am renewing it. Taking the pledge again and again; see?"

"Well — I don't *quite* see it."

"Surely! It was you yourself that broached the forbidden subject."

"Well — that's enough. Now sit down again, please, and talk sense."

"Very well, I will. There now — but what are you crying for?"

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"Tell me, sweet; what is it?"

"Oh! Oh! You've given me the horrors! Oh! I can't stop! Your blinded child — crawling away, sightless — helpless — screaming" —

"Never mind, love! There; let me hold your hand again. I take it all back!"

"Oh, you can't — ever — oh! oh!"

"Yes, I can. See here — listen. The child's eyes got well."

"Really?"

"Yes; really; first one eye and then the other grew in again; and she grew up a lovely girl. And the cruel man fell in love with her."

"Good! And she refused him?"

"Yes — told him she was the same girl and scorned him."

"Splendid!"

"And he went away and took poison" —

"Delicious!"

"Yes, delicious poison. And hanged himself" —

"Capital!"

"Of course, — capital punishment. And then he blew his brains out."

"Anything else?"

"Yes; he was struck by lightning and died of old age."

"Then what?"

"Then they hurried and buried him for fear worse should befall him. Aha! I see you smiling behind your handkerchief! I knew I could cure you!"

"Yes; you're a dear, good doctor."

"Now let me see your eyes. Whew! how the lids are swelled!"

"Hideous, of course."

"Utterly so. But I know an excellent application for swelled eyelids."

"Cold water. I'll go and get some."

"No; stay. It's something else. You've often tried it on your children when they had been crying."

"Well — never mind that. You have a wonderful imagination. You ought to write a story."

"I'm going to; yours."

"Ha-ha! When you find it out, you may!"

Sunshine being restored they talked of other things.

"What a womanly soul Margaret has developed!"

"Oh — dear girl — she always had a womanly

soul. Ever since she could speak, I have known that when Meg began 'But, Mamma,' defeat and disaster were in store for *me*. A balanced nature — head and heart — logic and love — I study it and wonder at it. Phil I know, but Meg is something of a stranger, and always was."

"Whom does she" —

"Resemble, you would say? I don't wonder you ask."

"Is it her father? As they say, does she favor her father?"

"Perhaps. Let us change the subject."

Then they talked of Phil and his future. Anne came inevitably, though gradually, to the conclusion that she must let her boy go — for a while, until Strafford could do better for him on the little railroad. It would be easier to get him into the management after he had been away and broadened his knowledge than it would be if he stayed on where he was.

"How good you are to forgive all my hatefulness, and go on caring for us as if I were nice!"

"Why, dear Anne, there is nothing to forgive."

"Oh, yes there is. Don't be a goose, and don't think I am one, and unconscious when I ill-treat you."

"Well, have it your own way. Suppose, Anne, you did cut up rusty a little when I began to talk to you — you can easily balance the account."

"I can *not*! I've told you so often enough."

"You have n't heard yet how I mean. I only

want you to call me George just once more in your life — my beloved Anne."

"Well; *George*, then! Is that enough to atone for all?"

"Say I'm not a nuisance to you!"

"You are a — blessing!"

"Really? Say that again."

"You are a blessing! But now, Blessing, will you kindly brighten? I want to go to Meg."

So with a laugh they parted.

Anne rejoined her daughter and told her the conclusions arrived at regarding Phil; and they had a long talk of mingled gladness and regret, over the impending separation. Of course Meg said no word about her mother's change of tone. "I told you so" was a stranger to her lips.

How guilelessly effusive Meg was over Strafford's unfailing goodness toward them! She let her mother know, without the slightest concealment, how large a place in her heart he filled. Anne was suddenly struck with a new thought. Suppose Margaret and Strafford should fall in love with each other! Too delightful to think of! Too blessed to hope!

This sweet fancy haunted her. How many of her problems that would solve! A happy future secured to her dear, splendid, poor, plain, tender-hearted daughter! Married to such a man — the finest fellow, take him for all in all, whom she herself had ever known! A faultless man — or rather a man of only one fault, an absurd infatua-

tion for Anne McVey that blinded him to the infinitely greater value of Anne's daughter!

"O Nature, what a cruel mother you are! How unjust to your daughters! The least worthy you favor and make much of; the most worthy you scourge with the cruel stripes of ugliness, and you smile while they creep away blinded with tears — like Strafford's imaginary victim.

"My face — yes, there I see it in the window-pane! There are the lines, and points, and curves, and tints I used to glory in; knowing all the time that I had done nothing to merit any favor of heaven. Perhaps if I had proved myself more worthy to possess good looks, I might have been able to bequeath them to my darling daughter. But I am helpless — how helpless!

"Cannot I contrive in some way to transfer George's fancy from me to her? The dear boy! That would cure the regret I feel at seeing him wasting his sweet heart on me. Oh, what a mother I would be to him — so much better than a wife! If he only knew it! Let me see — how can I try? What can I do?

"Oh, nothing — nothing! I must n't fall into the mistake of the foolish mother in the old novel ('Pride and Prejudice,' was it? or 'Sense and Sensibility?'), who spoiled all by providing so many channels for love to run in toward her daughter that love itself would have been exhausted! No; I can't stir hand or foot. Oh, I would like to *flay off* what prettiness I have left,

and give it to Meg!" And she clutched her fair features as if to put her threat in execution.

The iron wheels of fate rolled swiftly along the iron rails of time. Phil gayly bade them good-by one day "for a while;" and they began the hopeless task of outliving an immortal regret.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE OLD PIONEER.

So Phil got charge of his engine — “the old Pioneer,” the first locomotive (as the railroad men say) “that ever turned a wheel in Chicago.”¹

Scarcely had he got fairly at work on the new line when he received a letter from his former friend, Jim Sanders, announcing that he wanted to come up and try his luck as a conductor on the Galena railroad. He said his father lived in Galena. He said his brother Sam was already doing well as a fireman on the Pioneer. In fact, he gave so many excellent reasons for the change that it was evident he had some other motive which he did not give; and Phil, reading between the lines and putting this and that together, easily reached the conclusion that Jim’s flighty and ambitious wife (our old friend Dolly Dutcher) was the moving spring. She had within Phil’s memory

¹ The Pioneer was a second-hand engine, bought by the Galena Railroad from the Rochester and Tonawanda Railroad. The little stranger arrived by the brig Buffalo, on October 10, 1848, and was unloaded in Chicago by five men, one or more of whom is still (1888) living in the same city, where something like a thousand engines now arrive and depart daily. At this present writing, the old Pioneer is resting and rusting in the Chicago machine shops of the Northwestern Railroad, within hearing of the disdainful snorts of her strong successors.

changed from grub to chrysalis — the other step was to be the natural consummation of her destiny.

Phil was surprised at the ease with which Jim Sanders found the place he craved. It only needed a letter from Strafford vouching for him as honest, strong, good-natured, temperate, able, and industrious, to set him straightway into the berth of passenger-train conductor. But in the West such men were never at a loss for profitable employment.

Jim and Dolly and Jim's brother Sam lived with the old folks at Galena. Phil's home was at Chicago; but he found himself, between whiles, occasionally at the Sanders' mansion during his frequent stops at the former place; and his old dislike of Dolly soon wore off under the influence of her very genial smiles and remarkable good looks.

He was enthusiastic in his new berth; so fond of the lovely and lively "Pioneer" that she filled his daily thought and nightly dream, to the exclusion of any more human entanglements. He and Sam attended their engine "up to the handle," and in consequence, she was "always right on it;" "up an' a-comin' every time;" "able fer all that is loose;" "a holy terror;" "a caution;" and any other engine, compared to her, was "a scrap-heap."

Phil's old friends would scarcely have known him (except by his looks), so strengthened and sobered and preoccupied was he by his new re-

sponsibilities. Grave, brave, and intent on his work, this mere boy was unmistakably, in his own sphere, a man, to call no other man master.

On a certain fine day in the summer of 185—, behold the Pioneer, with her passenger train attached, pulling out of Chicago station, and rounding the near curve.

“ Brake, Sam ! ”

Fireman Sam Sanders dropped the stick he had been about to pitch into the firebox, and banged the door shut just in time to head off the puff of smoke and flame that rushes back on any sudden disuse of the steam. Then he sprang to the tender-brake and turned and twisted it, pull after pull, until with his whole weight and strength not another tooth could be caught in the ratchet. Then, and not till then, did he take time to lean out of the cab and look forward.

Then he saw, perilously near, a little crowd of people gathered around a wagon whereof the left-hand hind wheel was deep in the mud in close proximity to the right-hand rail of the road. He also saw that the danger was past, for the halting train would come to a stand-still before the Pioneer's pilot could quite reach the wagon.

The occurrence — the “ stalling ” of a wagon and team — was common enough in those early days in Chicago. The only streets that had any pretense of pavement were covered with planks laid flatwise, side by side in the mud ; and after a rain, every passing wagon as it struck each plank sent up a long, thin streak of water from the

crack between it and its neighbor; and when a wheel chanced to plump into a crack lengthwise, it promptly sank half its diameter, and made no further progress unless by spinning on its hub. (In these later days, it is not uncommon to find remnants of those old driveways, from six to twelve feet below the present street grades.) This particular wagon had simply plunged into the interstice between the plank-ends and the railroad track, and there it hung, leaning over toward the rails, and resting peacefully as if it had lain down to stay.

"Looks like it was an empty wagin," said Sam. "Oh, no, — not by a jug-full! See them pigs o' Galeny lead? Don't they look jes' like leetle no'-ccaount playthings? Jest as innocent as a reg'lar *meat* pig in a garding, th't can't find the hole he got in threw, when ye're a-tryin' t' drive him aout. They jes' lay thar a-wishin' somebody 'd try to lift 'em! It ain't that they're so awful heavy — only they bear daown so hard."

Now came hurrying forward conductor, brakemen, and passengers, to add numbers to the crowd and foolishness to its counsel. One simple-minded passenger suggested that "them things in the wagin should be pitched out;" and on being encouraged so to do, he climbed into the vehicle and took hold of one, but soon concluded, amid the jeers of the populace, that he would let it rest where it lay.

"I did n't know as you had 'em spiked daown."

Another team was hitched on, so that there

were then four horses and two drivers all in each other's way, and all swearing except the horses. The horses could n't pull together, any more than the drivers could swear together. It is not in the nature of the horse to put forth his strength persistently on a load which fails to respond to his drag. As Sam expressed it, in professional phrase: —

“Horses don't seem t' never have no sand in their sand-box. Soon 's ever they git stalled they jes' slide their drivin' wheels an' don't pull a paound.”

Phil contemplated the troubled scene with much equanimity, looking down from his cab-window and nodding acquiescence to Sam's suggestion: —

“We're like the corpse at the funer'l. We kin stan' it 's long 's they kin.”

But when, the patience of the drivers being exhausted on the foolish horses, they begun to apply the lash, Phil had to interfere, being, as he said himself, “a leetle cracked” regarding the suffering of dumb brutes. He jumped down, elbowed his way through the crowd, and with his brawny black hands and hard voice put an end to the useless torture. Then (using, as was his habit, the local “lingo”) he cried: —

“Stop yer whippin'! Take off that head team 'n' git onter yer wagin.”

“What ye goin' t' do abaout it? Goin' t' keep yer engine thar all day — er goin' t' run over us?”

Phil disdained to explain his plans to a mere

horse-driver ; and quietly enforced his instructions and had the two superfluous horses removed and the way cleared. Then he uncoupled the engine from the train, and seizing a stake about sixteen feet long, he set one end of it against the wagon, pointed the other toward the engine, and called to Sam to "Come ahead, kind of easy."

"Kind of easy !" Sam hastened to obey his beloved chief, though his heart was in his throat, for he knew that it would take but a hair's breadth too much opening of the throttle to send the giant machine over the stick, and Phil, and all. So the Pioneer advanced with a slow, ponderous, hesitating movement, much as the trained elephant marches over his prostrate keeper in the show.

"Oh, come on ! What are you afraid of ?" said Phil, tired of holding up the heavy stake.

"Who's a-runnin' this h'yer engine jes' now ; yew er me ?"

And the crowd laughed to see the engineer thus snubbed by his own fireman.

At length the advanced shoulder of the engine came in contact with the end of Phil's stake ; and she, not minding the impact much more than if a fly had alighted on her smokestack, surged slowly forward, pushing wagon, horses and all, clear out of the rut and on to terra firma ; where the horses (finding that their load was not clinched and riveted to the solid earth as they had supposed) easily walked away with it, while the useless stake fell thumping to the ground.

"Well done, Pioneer," said a plain, farmer-like looking man who had been the most persistent of all the spectators, but whom Phil now set eyes on for the first time with a startled glance of half-recognition. Then the stranger scrambled back into the train with the other passengers, and Phil and Sam coupled the engine to the cars once more, and re-attached the bell-cord, after which recommenced their interrupted progress. Quickly gathering headway, the Pioneer and her load sped along westward, soon passing out from the then narrow city limits and rattling over open sunlit prairie where now, a generation later, stand miles of buildings in serried ranks.

"Who was that man?" Phil asked himself. "What is there about him that reminds me of something or other?"

Now and again the halt at a station would divert Phil's thoughts from the half-remembered stranger. Sometimes it was only a moment's pause — mail and express to be exchanged and a passenger or two to leave and to take up — while Phil kept the bell ringing and leaned out from his window to catch the conductor's signal to go on. Then again would come a longer stop, wherein he could make the circuit of the machine, cotton waste and oil-can in hand, feeling every journal to see that it was cool, dropping a little oil in each of the numberless well-remembered places, and wiping a stray stain here and there from spots which, to most eyes, would seem not to need any attention whatever. Whenever

the halt was long enough to admit of it, the same perplexing man was always at hand, watching Phil's practiced movements with an air of interest that intensified Phil's wonder at his own wonderment. That look — where and when had he seen it? In some other world, before he was born, or where?

“Who's that galoot, Sam?”

“He hain't the pleasure o' my 'quaintance, so fur's heerd from.”

“Looks kind of familiar to me.”

“Mebbe it's some figger in some fashion-plate ye've seed some'rs.”

Phil shook his head.

“He kep his eye glued onter ye, 's though he mought be a long-lost father o' yourn.”

These suggestions furnished no clew to Phil's puzzle. Hours elapsed; the dinner-station was reached, and there the mysterious stranger elected to eat at the train-hands' table instead of with the other passengers; listening to everything, but saying nothing. His “Well done, Pioneer,” were the only words Phil had heard him speak. His voice in uttering them sent a kind of thrill through Phil's heart; and ever since, the Pioneer in its rhythmical puffs seemed to say “Well, done, Pioneer; well done, Pioneer,” for mile after mile.

CHAPTER XIX.

"BOD FOR THE COO."

"BRAKE, Sam !"

Again the same rapid words and motions. Twice in one trip Sam declared was "gittin' m'not'nous." When he got a chance to look ahead, he saw, at a road crossing not far off, a little herd of cattle leisurely crossing the track, and he also saw that if the hindmost beast did not change his mind and his course, he and the Pioneer would reach the crossing together, which would be "bod for the coo" and perhaps for some other folks.

On marched the doomed quadruped, taking no warning from the rapid barks of Phil's whistle; thinking probably more about nature's infernal green-head flies than of man's infernal green-backed steam-engines. As the brute reached the ticklish point and saw the encroaching pilot (cow-catcher), slowing up but not yet stopping, he hesitated, turned away from it, faced the cattle-guard, tried in his lumbering way to jump it, fell on its farther edge, and was rolled under the wheels. His bulk against the drivers brought the train finally to a stand-still.

"What's th' matter," said Sam, coming around. Phil silently pointed to a bent crank-pin.

"What yer goin' t' dew?"

"Disconnect 'n' run with one side."

"Sh'll I dror the fire?"

"No. Open the door and bank it down a leetle." (Spoken from the depths of the tool-box, where Phil was arming himself for work.)

"Ain't yer 'fraid she'll blow all her water aout?"

"No. She's got three gauges good. Throw in a bucketful when she begins t' blow off, but keep the fire going. I sha'n't be long."

Already he was at his work with hammer, wrench, and chisel. His great, quick blows fell with unerring precision on the chisel's head, while his eyes were intent only on its edge.

"Say, my son; don't ye never pound yer fingers?"

Of course it is the inevitable countryman who asks the question, and of course Phil's answer is a silent, preoccupied shake of the head, which may mean, "No," or "yes, indeed," or "go on, Uncle, don't bother me."

Meanwhile the train-hands and passengers are dragging out the poor brute that did the mischief. By bloody horns, and hoofs, and tail, they at last succeed; and as they roll him into the ditch, he gives one bellowing groan of inarticulate anguish. It catches Phil's ear and calls him as does the sound of a trumpet a sentinel on post. He drops his chisel, runs around to the spot, gathering a broad mullein leaf by the way, covers the brute's staring eye with the leaf, and then brings down

the hammer with a cracking blow that half buries the peen true in the star of the broad, bovine forehead. No more pain in that huge, mangled frame.

“Should n’t oughter killed him, Phil!”

“Why not?”

“May make the road li’ble fer him, though he wuz fus’ struck on the crossin’.”

“Well, let the road pay for him and send me the bill.” And he was at his work again before they had got over smiling at his little joke.

A semicircle of appreciative onlookers surrounds Phil at his work, foremost among whom is naturally the keen-eyed countryman. Every gib, every key, every bolt, and every set-screw was strained in its place by the bending of the crank-pin. Fast and furious fall Phil’s blows upon them, until one after another they give up their grip and come out, and are gathered up by the watchful Sam. The parallel-rod that connects the two drivers is taken off, with its brasses, and loaded up on the tender. The connecting-rod follows suit. He disconnects the valve-stem and fastens the valve in the centre so as to cover all the ports; removes the connecting-rod which joined it to the rocker, and the work is done—one side of the Pioneer is dead and safely coffined.

At the journey’s end, Phil and Sam with some difficulty got their engine into the round-house, where Phil had a consultation with the master mechanic in charge. When Phil got to the railroad hotel he found Sam washed and fed, and en-

joying all the luxury of a chair tilted back against the wall on the porch of a country tavern, smoking the cigar of peace in the cool of the evening after a hot day's work.

"Wal, — what's the verdict?"

"I'm to go in on the night run and get a new pin."

"Where does that leave me?"

"You can put in your time here in the shop."

"Humph!"

CHAPTER XX.

LAWFUL AND UNLAWFUL.

THE only question which ever arose between Phil McVey and his employers was in regard to his officious humanity in killing the maimed brute which had been struck by the Pioneer. The owner of the ox, our old friend Burr Hobbs, sued the railroad in the local justice court, and of course got a verdict from a jury of farmers, and judgment thereon from a country justice of the peace. On appeal to the Circuit Court the cause was tried *de novo*. There was no dispute about the facts in the case ; it turned entirely upon the questions of law involved, namely, whether the place where the animal was struck, or the place where he was killed, should be held to be the locality of the accident. If the former, then it was on a public road-crossing and the company was not liable for damages. If the latter, it was the private domain of the railway and the company must pay.

On the whole, the court was disposed to have the new points of law passed upon by the Supreme Court of the State, and therefore instructed the jury to find for the plaintiff, it being well understood that the case would be appealed.

In the Supreme Court the judgment was reversed and the cause remanded.

So the company won its case, and the owner of the ox was ruined by his fruitless lawsuit. But oh, what a pity that the road did not then proceed to pay generously for the dead brute !

The desire to get rid of the carcass of the luckless ox has led us temporarily far ahead of our story, which really halts with Phil and Sam on the porch of the railroad hotel at Galena.

After a pause Sam said : —

“ Dolly ’s a-goin’ in t’-night.”

“ Why don’t she go in to-morrow on the day run with her husband ? ”

“ Sot her heart on goin’ t’-night.”

“ What does Jim say ? ”

“ Jim ? He ain’t got noth’n’t say ’baout noth’n’ ’t Dolly wants. He’s only her husband, ye know.”

“ Humph ! ”

“ Guess yew ’ll kinder hev t’ look aout fer her a leetle.”

“ Humph.”

In spite of his cynical grunt, Phil did spend a little more time than usual that evening over his simple toilet ; principally evidenced by some half dozen or so of soapy ablutions and a short visit to the barber. Then, later, when he did see Dolly, she “ shone ” her pretty eyes at him, and claimed his escort without the smallest pretense or affectation of humility. Her heart swelled again with impatience to add his curly scalp to her crowded

belt of trophies, especially in view of her mortifying recollections of his old disdain.

Dolly was a born flirt, and had never outgrown her congenital failing. Handsome, underbred, unprincipled, her beauty had come upon her as a surprise, and the novelty of her prowess had never worn off. For selfish reasons of her own she had always kept carefully within the limits of the law; but, being a childless, irreligious wife of several years standing, married to a man far too good for her, she was walking in a slippery path.

Phil had no thought of playing any part but that of the cool, taciturn escort; unconscious of her charms and unobservant of the fact that she was a woman and he a man. There were no sleeping-cars in those days, so after a very short talk about their former acquaintance he arranged a whole seat for her, with shawls, satchel, and coat, and left her to her slumbers, while he departed to the baggage-car to smoke and chat with his fellow employees. Dolly was once more piqued and offended by his conduct. It must be because he remembered her as she was when a poor bound-girl — could n't quite get used to her being "a lady." She resolved that if she got hold of him she would make him smart for this!

When Phil looked in again, somewhere near midnight, to see how his fair charge was getting on, she was sitting up looking out of the window into the moonlight, her pretty profile and rippling hair displayed to the best advantage. As he approached her, she removed the articles from her

seat to the one opposite, with the simplest air in the world; so what could he do but take the place?

"Could n't get to sleep, Mrs. Sanders?"

"No! could n't get t' sleep, 'n' did n't want. But don't call me Mis Sanders. Call me Dolly. Everybody calls me Dolly, so why should n't you? I'm goin' t' call you Phil, anyhow!"

"Dolly Forshortness?"

"No — never mind them days."

"Well — Dolly then! I'm awful sorry! Was there anything I could have done for you to make you more comfortable?"

"No. Yes. You might 'a' come 'n' be'n kinder sociable like!"

"Oh! If I'd known you were awake and lonesome."

"I sh' think you might 'a' known!"

It is a long time from midnight to daylight, even in summer. Neither of them was a great talker, but every whispered word brought them nearer together. Alas, where were Phil's mother and sister, and the discreet and gentlemanly Stratford?

With returning daylight came returning circumspection and shrewd offishness on Dolly's part. She smoothed her ruffled plumage and rearranged her hair, and her face at the same time, and when Phil parted from her at the station in Chicago, he was astonished to find that she regarded him merely as an amusing acquaintance. This was a new experience — to Phil.

"Well, Dolly, when shall I see you again?"

"Oh, that's owin' to when you take a notion to drop 'round."

"Well; that's owin' to when you tell me to drop 'round."

"When? 'Most any evenin'. I'm goin' to be pretty busy while I'm here. You tell when you'll be 'round."

"Meet you at Thompson's restaurant at one o'clock, if you say so."

"O. K. I'll be on hand."

And there she was — with a lady friend. Dolly laughed when she saw how disconcerted Phil was on being introduced to the inconvenient third party.

"Thought we'd make it a 'West-Side couple': one man and two girls!"

So Phil had to make the best of it. At the restaurant Dolly was gay as a lark: placed herself where the largest number of people could see her; saw every man who stared at her (and they were many), and welcomed his stare; laughed at everything anybody said, herself included, and, in default of anything to laugh at, laughed at nothing.

Then when the repast was concluded she walked down Clark Street and Lake Street, the observed of all observers, and the picture of self-satisfaction. Her two rings she wore outside her one glove, which adorned the hand that carried her parasol. (The other hand, bare and swinging, did not seem to need any rings.) She chewed a tooth-

pick which protruded between her cherry lips, and certainly thought herself "as fashionable a lady as walked those streets, and every inch the lady; and nobody would n't take her to 've come from th' 'ole Tansey farm!"

"Won't yer drop in to'-night, Mister McVey? Jim 'll be home to-night."

But in spite of this extra inducement Phil declined: —

"Well — I've something else on hand to-night. Suppose we make it to-morrow night."

"O. K. We 'll be lookin' for you to-morrow night."

But when the morrow night came, and Phil, in his Sunday clothes, arrived with it, behold, Mistress Dolly had gone out to pass evening and night with a friend!

Phil soon went out to Galena and brought in the Pioneer, and she resumed her regular runs. On one of them the mysterious stranger was a passenger.

"Well, Mr. McVey. You and me seems to be destyned to be fellow-travelers on the journey through the vale."

A nod.

"I've been to Galena ever since I saw you there."

Not even a nod.

"Looked into lead-mining much?"

A shake of the head.

"I bought that red hill that's on the off side going into Galena."

"You bought that hill?" said Phil, pausing perforce to look at a man who could either buy a lead-hill off-hand, or could stand there and tell such a dazzling lie.

"Well, yes, I thought I'd take that in. It was only nineteen thousand for all cash — twenty thousand time — and I've be'n a-watchin' you for some time — no need to tell me who you are — your name's Phil McVey — and if you'd like to take a-hold of it — the lead's got to come out of that hill if there's any in it — and like enough there ain't any" —

"I've got no capital to run a lead-mine, — nor even a one-handed bullet-mould, for that matter."

"Oh, well — I kept a leetle, jest for seed."

Here the stranger lugged out of his pocket a huge greasy wallet, big with papers and with bills of all denominations and all kinds of banks, those being the days of "stump-tail" currency.

"Looks like a good deal of money — but the' ain't no awful sight there. The fellers that owed it to me would make me take it — and there ain't no telling how long it'll be before it won't buy anything."

"What might your name be?"

"Prouder."

"What; Zury Prouder, of Spring?"

"That's what folks call me."

A light broke over Phil's face; a peculiar whole-hearted smile, showing both upper and

under teeth; that reminded Zury of Anne and almost took his breath away.

“Uncle Zury! I’m glad to see you! At last; after I’ve been wanting so long to make the acquaintance of my mother’s friend!”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MARRIED FLIRT.

"DRIVE kinder keefle this mornin', Phil. Don't let th' Pioneer git her foot over th' bridle 'n' kick her gears off while ye' re a-foolin' 'raound a-pickin' huckleberries."

"Why, Sam; what 's the matter with *you*?"

"Dolly 's aboard."

"Humph!"

Phil knew it well enough, as that fair enslaver had engaged the privilege of riding on the engine over a lonely part of the road. She was going back to Galena, laden, as she had planned, with the spoils of feminine warfare, and also burdened with a fixed determination that Chicago should become her permanent abiding-place, and that right soon!

"Now, Phil!" called the cheery tenor of Conductor Jim Sanders when the predestined way-station was reached.

"Yes! Now, Phil!" echoed the gay treble of Dolly as she reached up for help to climb the high step that leads to the engine cab. Phil wiped his grimy hand on a bit of clean cotton waste and dragged up her lithe form as if she had been a kitten. Then she was safely stowed on

the tool-box on Sam's side of the cab, with her skirts tucked around her well-shod feet; and Sam showed her where she could put them against the boiler if they got cold. Sam put the bell-cord into her hand and told her she must work her passage by ringing the bell to start; and also whenever they came to a post by the wayside marked "W," which he said stood for "Wring."

When they started, she fairly screamed with delight.

"Oh, is n't this perfectly splendid! I wish I was a fireman! Don't they *ever* let girls be firemen?"

"Could n't be done."

"Why not?"

"Make the engineers all cross-eyed."

"Stuff!"

"Fact! They 'd always be a-tryin' t' keep one eye on the track ahead, 'n' t' other on the fire-gal behind! In less 'n' a week their own mothers would n' know 'em." And Sam illustrated his position by the most frightful exhibition of artificial strabismus the world ever saw.

It was a sight to tempt any eye, to see her there looking out through the cab-window into the rapidly approaching distance; her hair and bonnet blown back from her veined temples, her cheeks glowing, her eyes sparkling, and her pearly teeth all showing between her parted lips. When full speed was attained she said: —

"What makes it shake so?"

At least she thought she said it, for she could

not hear even the slightest sound from her own mouth. Sam, however, seeing her lips move, put his ear close to them and she screamed:—

“WHAT MAKES IT SHAKE SO?”

“COZ THAT’S ITS LITTLE BIZ! IT’S GOT TER!”

She always forgot to ring the bell at the road crossings until Sam began doing it for her; but she atoned for this by doing it persistently long after it ceased to be necessary. At the first stop, she asked Phil if she could n’t do his work for a spell—she was tired of doing Sam’s. This with a bright smile at Sam, which intensified the jest of making the bell-ringing appear as the chief duty of firemen.

So she was safely transferred to Phil’s side by the simple process of his lifting her across without changing her posture as she sat, and placing her on the tool-chest, out of the way of the reverse-lever; and there she had the pleasure of “driving” the Pioneer very much as baby drives “horsey” when papa passes over the loose ends of the lines to mamma on the back seat of the carriage. Phil did n’t mind the trouble—not he! He merely held her very firmly in her seat, pinched her toes through her shoes, and remembered his night ride with her from Galena to Chicago.

Whenever Jim came to take Dolly away she exclaimed against it, and insisted on staying for one more station: and she only became willing to go when Phil showed her that her finery was getting spoiled by cinders and dust.

“Oh, well! If you’re tired of me, I’ll go!”

As soon as Mistress Dolly got back to her place in the car she began — or renewed — her attack on Jim to induce him to remove to Chicago.

Jim might just as well have given in at first as he did at last. Even a Samson could not have prevailed against such a Delilah, and poor Jim was no Samson. He thought it would nearly break the old folks’ heart to have him go, but he did not appreciate the countervailing fact that when he should depart Dolly would go too. The old folks shed no tears.

Now behold the little household started — Jim and Dolly, Phil and Sam. A frail bark, afloat on a treacherous sea, with breakers to leeward. Dolly recognized the fact that she needed vigorous care to hold Phil in proper check, but she felt equal to the task. All he chose to do for her profit and gratification he was at full liberty to go ahead with; as to any reciprocity, that she had not undertaken by any means.

Somehow it never chanced now that Phil’s run as engineer coincided with Jim’s run as conductor. If Jim’s was Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, Phil’s was certain to be Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, and *vice versa*. To be sure, Sam was always around, but Sam was a very simple-hearted country youth. It never struck him as “queer” that theatres, concerts, evening drives, and similar gayeties should be the frequent occurrences of the evenings when Phil was in town, or that Phil and Dolly should take them all in

together, or that Phil should suddenly begin to talk Dolly's dialect instead of his own speech, or that Dolly, a poor man's wife, should always be ornamented and arrayed for them after the manner of the lilies of the field, only more so.

Time came when Dolly took it into her light head to invite one of her young Galena friends to visit her. Her object was twofold; first, to show off her new glories and gayeties as a city matron; second, to provide herself an additional safeguard against Phil, who was getting more and more difficult to keep in order; — "to make him *behave*," as she would have expressed it. The proposed guest was Annie Masten, daughter of the Methodist minister, and of an old scholar of Anne's, Eureka, formerly Anstey. Phil had heard of her personal attractions, and having heard these rumors, he felt that curious indescribable interest in her which is hinted at by Patmore, in "The Angel in the House." That is to say, Phil was of the age when

"Unknown maidens, talked of, stir
His heart with reverential care."

When Dolly spoke to Phil of the expected arrival, she said in her flirty way: —

"Oh, Annie she'll cut me out completely when you see her! I sha'n't stand any more show than a last year's bird's-nest!"

"Such a woman don't live, 'n' can't be put up 'n' set a-goin'."

"Oh, you pshaw! An old married woman like me!"

Phil's answer to this was inarticulate, as they were alone and the light turned low.

"Now be-*have* your *biz-ness*!" said Dolly, and stoutly disengaged herself; — not too suddenly, and not without a hand-squeeze at parting.

"Sometimes I do think I might as well — and better." (Spoken slowly and with angry gravity.)

"Well! If you're goin' to be huffy about it! A little thing like that! And I with all my dishes to wash! After all that's come an' gone!" And she half turned away, put her handkerchief to her tearless eyes, and peeped at him from under one corner of it.

"Well, I'll bid you good-night. Will you leave the front door on the latch for me?"

"Goin' out?" (With a little coquettish dismay and reproach in her voice.)

"Yes. Sam's at home and upstairs in bed, you know."

"Oh, I ain't *scared*!" (An emphasis on the last word indicated that her perturbation was of a character more flattering to Phil.)

"I won't be late. Good-night."

"Well, good-night, then, if you must go." And she held out her pretty pink hand. Phil affected not to see it, put on his hat, and strode away; and he fairly hugged himself as he walked, to think that he had maintained his high moral ground! The more "cut up" she was, the better he liked it; for he did not love Dolly. He had not yet learned what love means.

Dolly stood still for a minute, listening to his retreating footsteps along the plank sidewalk. Then she hid her arm in her apron and her face in her arm in a pretty, childish way she had. But this was only for an instant — she dashed it away and turned to her work.

“Does he think he can bluff me? He’d better try it!” And her eyes snapped with a dangerous light, such as Mrs. Potiphar’s might have shot out toward the excellent Joseph when time was young and naughty women were — much the same as they are to-day.

Next morning at breakfast she was as gay as a lark, and apparently quite unobservant of Phil’s grave face and deep voice. She merely glanced after him as he departed for the engine-house, saying, —

“No danger! I can fetch him whenever I want to.”

This was the day for Phil’s run to Galena, and the next for his return to Chicago. Annie Masten was to come back with him, and had been charged by Dolly’s letter to be sure to ride on the engine; so Phil was introduced to her before starting.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BUD OF PERFECT WOMANHOOD.

YES; Phil had been forewarned of Annie Masten's beauty, but to a young man, to be forewarned is not to be forearmed. The wound which beauty inflicts on a susceptible heart is all the more severe because the victim has been nerv-
ing himself for the blow.

Annie had been away taking that "finishing year at boarding-school" which is so precious to country girls, and thus it happened that Phil had never seen her until the morning when she was brought up toward the engine to be made acquainted with the man who was to extend its hospitalities to her later in the day. He was busy putting the finishing touches to the machine, and did not at once look round at any of the numerous spectators who were, as usual, studying that still unfamiliar sight, a locomotive; but when he had oiled the last journal, and was about to mount to his perch, he heard his name called, looked around and — met his fate.

Whew! He felt that the half had not been told him! What man does not feel so, when he first sets eyes on a thoroughly lovely woman, having heard beforehand the fame of her charms?

Annie was one of those girls not *very* uncommon in the West, whom Nature seems to have set herself at work upon in some moment of happy leisure, just to see what she could do. With the universe to choose from, she takes such colors, shapes, and textures as, in her love of and pride in her work, she thinks will suit it best, and turns out — a bud of perfect womanhood! From the moment when you see the head and face, and the way the neck carries them, you know that every limb must be perfect, out to the very tip of each dainty nail; that every hair and every tooth will be found flawless from root to point; that health will be faultless; that even heart and soul and temper will be free from spot or blemish, and all in keeping with the angelic plan.

Phil did n't feel all this in detail; but he was "struck all of a heap" with a slight halting of the pulse and catching of the breath, as if frightened for the instant by a heavenly vision, for which past experience had not fully prepared him. He forgot that he had his oil can in one hand, his bunch of cotton waste in the other, his working blouse flying wide from a collarless throat, his face burned with fifty thousand miles of prairie wind and cinders — in fact, he forgot himself altogether, and simply gazed at his mother's namesake in round-eyed wonder.

Annie, on her part, met his gaze with a frank and fearless look from under her level brows; a look that showed a cordial interest in him as being his mother's son, and an amused patience

which could wait until he recovered his scattered senses. Perhaps, although so young, she had grown used to "men's ways" of looking at her face. As she once said : —

" Oh, when I first came out of school I thought every man I met must be some old friend of father's who knew me, although I had forgotten him ; but I soon found it was just *men's way* of looking at all girls who are — not absolutely deformed ; and now I don't mind it a bit."

Fortunately Mrs. Masten broke the silence before it grew embarrassing.

" Mr. McVey ; this is my daughter Annie, of whom I have spoken to you as being your mother's namesake."

" Oh, — Mrs. Masten, I — beg your pardon ; I did not see you before." (She had been standing directly beside her daughter all the time.)
" Mrs. Sanders told me that Miss Masten " —

Here unluckily his eyes fell on Annie again, and the power of connected speech was once more paralyzed.

" Yes, Mr. McVey ; I'm going to visit Dolly ; and, unless you object, I'm to make a visit to you first. I've been looking up at your parlor. It seems well lighted and well ventilated."

" Yes, Miss Masten ; we will try to make it accommodate you ; if you can stand our rough life for a little while."

" Oh, if you can stand it so long, I ought to be able to put up with it for a short time. Will you teach me to be an engineer ? Oh, there's Mr.

Sanders, too! Perhaps mother ought to have introduced us, though we have met before. Do you think I can learn to be an engineer?"

"Wal, Miss Masten, I should n' wonder. Dolly she rode with us t' other day, and began *her* eddication that-a-way. P'r'aps ye better step this way, so I kin begin by teachin' ye the pilot 'n' the head-light."

"Oh, dear me! Of course I know *them*! Even the cows know the cow-catcher and the head-light. And I know the cylinder where the steam pushes the piston back and forward; and I know the steam chest where the valve lives that lets the steam on and off — but just what moves the valve, at the right time" —

"Wal, some time when ye hev abaout a half a lifetime t' give t' studyin' the eccentric and the valve motion" —

"All aboard!" shouted the conductor, and the mother and daughter hurried away.

Phil poised himself on his step that he might follow with his eyes the trim and lithe young figure as it tripped along to the platform; then mounted his engine, feeling as if he had lost something, that something being the sight of Annie Masten's face.

"Great Scott!" said Sam.

"Whew!" said Phil.

"I *will* be blowed!" said Sam, as if he had finally made up his mind and arrived at an unalterable resolution. "Tell ye what she looks like, to *me*; its a new-born angel! And a she-one at that!"

Phil only shook his head to indicate that his feelings were too deep for utterance ; so they were, and therefore deeper than Sam's, who could at least express his determination to be blown. As Phil drove his iron horse eastward, he could not believe that that young person would soon be sitting on that tool-box by his side — there must be some mistake about it. But there, in due time, she sat, in human form to all appearance, though he hardly dared to look for fear he should wake up. And that certainly was a hand of flesh and blood he had grasped to help her up ; and it looked like a hand still, as it shone in its fine whiteness on the dark, coarse handle of the throttle valve.

“ Now, Mr. McVey, you must tell me just a little : of course I cannot learn much of such a great lesson in one hour.”

And she smiled a deprecatory little smile of acknowledged weakness and inferiority. So the bewildered Phil set his wits at work to play schoolmaster to the charming pupil. He spoke better English than ever before since he left his mother ; unconsciously recalling and imitating Anne in his choice and pronunciation of words. The noise made instruction difficult, but their voices were young and penetrating, and their heads close together.

“ Could I start the steam and stop it ? ”

“ Certainly ; just by pulling and pushing that handle you have hold of.”

“ Oh, mercy ! Does it move easily ? ”

"It does when I loosen this set-screw, that holds it fast. There, now I'll loosen it and you push it in as hard as you can."

The valve slowly closed; the noise of the exhaust ceased, the smoke began to leave the stack in a lazy roll, and the train to lose headway.

"How soon we see the difference! Now shall I start it again?"

"Yes, if you will; but not all at once; just a little at a time."

"Is n't that nice — to feel the power take hold again! I feel as if I had spread my wings and were drawing the cars!"

"Oh, don't do that!"

"What?" (In alarm.)

"Spread your wings yet awhile!"

"Oh — no. They have n't sprouted yet!"

"Sure?"

"Certain!" and she turned her perfect shoulders toward him to convince him that she was still an earthly being.

"How far out shall I pull the valve?"

"You see that mark on the slide? I keep that there for the level parts of the road. Then when we go up hill, or are behind time, or the train drags heavy, I give her a little more — down-hill a little less, or none at all." Now we are coming to a down-hill place where we usually oil the valves in the steam-chest; because it has to be done when she is not using steam, or the steam would blow all the oil out through the stack. Now shut off." She did so. "Now, Sam!"

And Sam stepped out with his can to oil the valves by hand, as was the fashion in those days. As he got round to that side and turned to come back, he made a pretense of staggering and slipping off, whereat Annie gave a shrill shriek and covered her eyes with her hands.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Phil, as the best way to reassure her. "It's only the boy's antics!"

But when Sam reëntered the cab, he was rewarded by Phil's leaning over toward him with "cuss-words," and the application of an opprobrious epithet particularly deprecated in Matthew fifth, twenty-second; — all inaudible to Annie, of course.

"He ought not to do so!"

"He 'll never do it again."

"Do you think you could trust me to start the train out of the next station we come to, all by myself — I mean so far as the throttle is concerned?"

"Ye-es; if you 'll give her steam only a very little at a time."

"Why so little?"

"Because if you give too much, the wheels will play round like lightning and not bite on the rails — not adhere."

"Then should we start off too fast?"

"We should stand a good chance not to start at all. The wheels must stick to the rails to give what we call adhesion to use up the steam force which we call traction."

"I see! It's like a good many other things —

more haste less speed!" And she looked at him, while an utterly ravishing dimple formed in each cheek.

The start from the next station was rather slow, but finally successful; and in good time they reached the ordinary pace; she silently begged for a little more, and a little more, until they were flying, and Sam looked over to see what was up. Annie spread her arms and shook her hands like the pinions of a homing pigeon, and cried:—

"Oh, my wings, my wings!" then pushed the valve back slowly to the notch and turned to Phil with a look of thanks and apologies and self-blame which might have earned forgiveness for a death-wound, if she had given him such a hurt.

Their words, looks, and actions were few and simple; but what thrills in the tones, the looks, the touches, and the meeting eyes and thoughts! Phil's heart was in such a state of tension that it was a relief when Annie went back to the passenger car. Suppose anything should happen to the engine; and that wonderful piece of porcelain be broken in his hands, before he could set it again on its pedestal!

"Good-by, Mr. McVey! I sha'n't have half time enough to thank you fully till we get home—scarcely enough even then!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

AT night again it seemed to Phil incredible that Annie should be at tea at their house ; and then that he should see her at breakfast was scarcely an occurrence which could happen without a miracle. But the wonders went on ; things taking place in their regular sequence, just as though she were a mere mortal like other women. The sun and moon rose and set without regard to there being any Annie Masten in the universe !

Naturally Annie and Dolly did most of the talking. Phil seemed to himself silent and moody by comparison ; but a few days cured him of his strangeness, and made Annie seem a little less supernatural — and all the more lovable. She, being named for Phil's mother, and the daughter of a woman who adored that mother as a type of all the earth possesses of womanly loveliness, was well-prepared to take Phil himself on trust for a dear friend or anything else he showed himself worthy to become.

Dolly arranged for all the expeditions ; Annie joined her in them, and Phil, and Jim, and Sam made up the necessary number of supernumeraries. Theatres had to be given up in view of

Annie's Methodism, but concerts and lectures, shows, picture-galleries, grain-elevators, and all the other possible objects of interest were well made use of on all the evenings not given over to prayer-meetings and similar services. Even these had no terrors for Phil. Purgatory with Annie would be better than Paradise with all the other angels.

" 'T is life where thou art :

'T is death where thou art not."

One might imagine that in this view of the case there must have been very little of life and a good deal of death in Phil's existence just now ; but not so : Annie was never wholly absent from him. During the long hours of engine-driving she seemed always to be there sitting on his tool-box where she had sat for that one blessed hour. Her hand seemed always on the point of the valve-handle where it had once rested ; he found himself grasping the rod lower down so as not to disturb the clasp of those fairy fingers, invisible to all eyes but his. Every step he took, every blow he struck, every word he said, had in it some thought of Annie Masten. And then the evenings when he got home, and the mornings before he started away — words fail to give more than a faint suggestion of the delight of those short and fleeting moments.

One evening Annie had a call from Perry Fenton, one of the leading young merchants of the young city. A bright, handsome fellow, a pleasant and rapid talker, a bachelor, and wonderfully

young to have reached such a position as he occupied. "Fenton is sharp as a tack," said his business friends. "Perry is as good as gold," said those who knew him best.

It was Sam who answered the rap at the door, and he was, as he afterward said, "knocked off his perch" at seeing a well-dressed man with *kid* gloves on, who handed him a visiting card and asked for Miss Masten.

"Why — come right in! To be sure! Miss Masten's right here in the settin'-room, — right this way. Annie, here's Mister O. H. P. Fenton, wants to speak to ye a minute."

Sam did not really know what a call meant, and made things as awkward as possible for a moment, but Fenton soon set them right. He advanced and shook hands with the blushing Annie who rose to meet him.

"Miss Masten? Your father whom I know well was kind enough to write me where I could find you."

"Yes; I've heard father speak of you, Mr. Fenton. Mrs. Sanders, Mr. Fenton; Mr. Sanders, Mr. McVey, Mr. — Sanders again. Be seated please! It was very kind of you to take the trouble to call!"

"Well — hardly! It was kind in your father to give me the chance. How is he, and how is your mother?"

"They are both very well."

"And how is Galena?"

"Galena is much as usual — doing as well as it

ever did, I guess ; but jealous at having the wind taken out of its sails by Chicago. You know Galena was an old town when Chicago was only a fort and a trading-post."

"Yes, indeed! My father was the first permanent settler who came here after the massacre, and I believe he would not have stayed, only he had n't money enough to get on to Galena! And now look at the place! I've grown up with it and watched it grow."

"An' they dew say, Mr. Fenton," said conductor Jim, "that you are one of the fellers that's made Chicago what she is; and are a-makin' her what she's a-goin' to be!"

"Yes, I know! People fool themselves awfully about such things. I tell *you*, Mr. Sanders, that it is n't the men who've made Chicago; it's Chicago that makes the men! When Providence shoved a line of great lakes away up into the heart of the grandest farm He ever laid out, and then put a harbor up at the furthest point in the line, He did n't leave much for men to do!"

"Well, the lakes *an'* the harbor laid ou' doors a good spell pretty quiet, afore you men took a holt on it."

"Oh, of course, of course. The good Lord gave us our food, but He did n't chew it up and feed it to us through a quill! But *then* — the best part of the *human* labor that helps us is n't done here. It's the Eastern fellows who make goods and send them here, and have the vessels call for grain to carry back; and the Western men who grow

the grain and send it here to swap for goods: they do the work for us."

"Why, Mr. Fenton; you don't seem to give much honor to your own work."

"No, Miss Masten; fact is, I *can't*. To hear Eastern and Western men talk of what *we* are accomplishing always reminds me of the Irishman who wrote home for his brother to come over, and when he got here said, to him, 'Arrah, Dinnis! It's an illegant counthry it is! All yez have to do is jes' carry the bricks an' the morther up the laddher; an' there's min on the top to take 'em fram ye and do all the work!' Well, we Chicago fellows are only the bricklayers—the other fellows bring us the bricks and mortar."

Fenton had a good brogue, and fell into it and out of it with perfect facility; so the little company laughed heartily at his illustration, and before long were lost in admiration of his social powers. They had only seen such men in plays.

So passed the evening, delightful to all except to poor Phil, awakened to a new pain undreamed of before. He had been spoiled all his life by being among people who thought more of him than he deserved, or than he did of them. Now to feel himself anxious to please, but overshadowed by a man with more ability to do so—

"Well," said Fenton, rising, "I must bid you good-night. Miss Masten, could you take a class in my Sabbath-school?"

"I should like to, ever so much; but I'm going home too soon to make it worth while. I'll call

in next Sunday and look on, if I may. Perhaps I can steal some ideas for our school."

"Do, please. I think you were at prayer-meeting Wednesday night."

"Yes; I was there."

"I thought I recognized your face. I — can't say why I happened to notice it among so many."

This was said with a marked pause which, if it had been Dolly's case, would have led her to think of a very obvious and flattering reason; but not so Annie. Compliments escaped her "like water off a duck's back."

"Well, good-night; and please don't forget my message to your father."

When he had gone, poor silent Phil said to himself:—

"O Lord! Whereabouts do I belong? A dirty, ignorant railroad hand!" and he groaned in spirit.

The little coterie fell into talk about their visitor and the subjects he had started, in which conversation Phil could not join. The others observed this, and strove in vain to rally him in friendly fashion. Dolly pronounced him "sulky," but sweet Annie guessed his trouble in some instinctive, inarticulate way; and plied her innocent art to raise his spirits.

"I wonder if he is n't sorry and — well a little ashamed to be shut up in a store, buying and selling, and talking, and writing, and calculating, instead of out of doors at work!"

"Sorry!" exclaimed Sam, sarcastically. "Why

he jes' cries his eyes out, nights, t' think he 's a-makin' twenty thaous'n' dollars a year instead of fifty dollars a month! You bet!"

"Oh, yes, the money's nice, of course — but I'd rather make it with an axe than with a pen. Don't you think so, Mr. McVey?"

"I never tried the pen — nor the twenty thousand a year."

"Why, them soft white hands o' his'n'd be black on the back 'n' blistered on the front in less 'n a brace o' shakes!"

"Well, if I were a man I should *hate* to have soft white hands."

Here she held up her own fair, long, left hand; pink-and-white, dimpled, straight in every bone, gently curved in every outline, and taper in the extremities. The fingers were so flexible that as she stretched them out each bent backward from palm to point, and she held up that hand and looked at it as calmly as if it were a commonplace every-day sight!

"There — my palms are not *very* callous, I'm sorry to say; but I think more of those needle marks on my forefinger than — anything else! Folks have offered me a guard; but I wouldn't wear one for fear I should appear to be *quite* useless, when I'm not — quite."

She stopped and blushed to find that she was palavering about herself. Dolly took up the talk:

"Oh, folks like yew and Perry Fenton, *yew* don't hev t' work! Ketch yew! All ye've got t' dew is jes' t' set still 'n' look pretty!"

Annie laughed gayly and cried : " Money would have to be very cheap before I could make a fortune that way ! But if Mr. Fenton makes his so, or by anything that is easy and effeminate, I should think he would hate it. If I were he I should be just wild to get out and face the sun and wind — on a locomotive or somewhere."

She looked at Phil for sympathy, but it would not do ; even her words were like barbed arrows in his heart. He saw that she *pitied* him ! Faugh !

Phil lay awake a while that night, for the first time in his life, and repeated to himself the question, " Where do I belong ? " Where he did *not* belong was evident enough — it was among people like Mr. Fenton. Was the door to that bright domain still open to him ? Who was the most cultivated person he had ever known ? His mother. She would have felt perfectly at home in their evening talk, and everybody would have recognized it, even if she had scarcely spoken. If she were here now could she lead him into learning and manners like Fenton's ? Perhaps. Should he try ? And discussing this problem he fell asleep.

Annie herself pondered a little over things in general between her prayers and her slumbers. Her thoughts and feelings would not have been wholly unpleasing to Phil if he had known them. Strength is more alluring than " sweetness and light " to a maiden ; she having so little of the one and so much of the others as a birthright.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PHIL AND PERRY ; THE RIVALS.

As a concession to that heaven where Annie Masten dwelt and where he had no part, Phil made one of a party to attend prayer-meeting on the next Wednesday night. It made his heart leap to see how glad Annie was to have him go ; and yet it frightened him, too. He could not believe that his skepticism would be shaken — what then ? Should he put on the pretense of something he did not feel ? Never ! And when he failed to meet her wishes —

At the meeting Phil joined in the singing and bowed his head at the prayers. He listened to the dreary efforts of novices pattering platitudes of egotism, called “spiritual experiences,” weariness to the flesh ; of no consequence to anybody except the narrators, who found it so difficult to keep on and quite impossible to leave off. Then there were other addresses, wise, bright, inspiring remarks of Fenton and other practiced speakers, affectionate, winning ; — comforting to the comfortless, consoling to the grief-stricken, charitable to the repentant, relieving to the sin-laden soul ; — but to him incomprehensible, speaking a language he could not learn. He was not comfort-

less, nor grief-stricken, nor repentant, nor sin-laden. The participants were to him as mermen and mermaids would be to us if we looked into the sea's calm depths and saw them talking words we could not hear nor construe and did not wish to, because we preferred stormy winds to still waters.

He felt Annie's presence at his side, and knew in his heart that she was offering fervent petitions for his conversion. He even had reason to believe that one of the slips of paper read out by the leader, the one in which "a friend" asked "the prayers of all present for the conversion of a young man still in darkness but worthy of the great light," was for him. *Again* prayed for! by pious souls having faith in direct answers to prayer — surely, if there were an all-hearing ear these intimate and friendly calls could not remain unnoticed! And if the result showed that they *were* unnoticed, what must he believe as to their boasted efficacy? No answer, from earth or heaven!

Faithfully he strove (as the speakers directed) to divest his nature of its stubborn will, his "pride" as they called it, and to give himself over wholly to the sweet and solemn influences of the place and time. Again he waited with bated breath for the miracle. None came. He still found himself cold and critical, tearless and unmoved. The old rebellious thought still possessed him.

The question is not whether a belief is safe and comforting, but whether it is true! When

you are offered a bribe to fall in with it, you'd better suspect you're being fooled." So after a while he wearied of the fruitless effort, and his attention flagged, and he gave himself over to thinking simply and solely of the fair being at his side. How clear in her humble faith she was! How single-hearted in her devotion to piety and duty! How free from the pride of intellect which possessed him! How unquestioning in her modest acceptance of every word which had been taught her by authority! How great was the gulf between them, and how impassable by either!

On their way home the dear little missionary tried to "improve the occasion," and Phil was delighted to be able to agree with her as to the safety, comfort, consolation, blessedness, poetry, of abiding and unquestioning faith; but then she hung a little more heavily on his arm and, looking up frankly into his eyes, asked:—

"And have you yet found the faith?"

"No, Annie."

"If you would only put away your pride, and wish heartily to be taken into Christ's Kingdom, He would do the rest—you would not have to do anything."

"I have no pride—nothing to be proud of; and I *am* willing; that's what I went for. What more could I do?"

"You are lost in sin. You should cast your burden at the foot of the cross."

"I s'pose I'm bad enough,—but I don't feel

any burden, and don't know how to lay down what I never picked up."

"Why not resolve to get rid of your stubborn unbelief?"

"Let's see what that means. Unbelief is the absence of belief. How can a man get rid of the absence of something? There's my empty hand" (and he held it out in the moonlight), "how can I get rid of the emptiness of it—or of my mind?"

"You can fill it with belief."

"You said Christ was to do that for me."

"You can pray to Him to do it."

"Oh—pray first and believe afterwards."

Annie put her handkerchief to her eyes to hide tears of disappointment and mortified zeal, and Phil felt like a brute. Then he tried a little humorous diversion.

"The country-folks have a funny story about faith. Will you be shocked if I tell it to you?"

"Oh, I don't know till I hear it. You will have to take the risk of that. But I will try not to be."

"Well, it is n't wicked—only droll. I think I'll tell it in dialect, as I heard it."

"Do! I love dialect."

"Wal; wunst the' wuz a ol' widderwoman, a raal pious ol' Christian's ever drawed th' breath o' life. *Faith*? Why, faith ain't no name fer it! Ye could n't tell *her* noth'n' abaout answers t' prayer, 'cause she knowed all about it by pussn'l 'xperunce. All ye hed t' dew wuz t' *b'lieve* ye'd

git it, 'n' ye'd git it every time. Ef folks wuz disapp'inted it wuz allers 'cause the' wuz doubt mixed in with th'er faith. Bible said ef the' wuz doubt, th' size of a grain o' mustard-seed, why that would knock th' hull business. But ef the' wuz faith the size of a grain o' mustard-seed, why you wuz all hunky.

"Naow, she lived alongside a hill; 'n' th' spring wuz on t' other side o' that same hill; 'n' all th' hot summer it wuz orfle hard work climbin' over that hill 'n' back fer every drop o' water she wanted.

"All of a sudden it struck her, 'why not pray that hill daown level?' Ef faith would remove maount'ns; surelye it could git away with a small hill! 'Hev I got faith?' sez she. 'Yew bet I hev got faith! I hain't got noth'n' else!'

"So one Sunday afternoon, when she hed n't noth'n' speshl t' distract her mind, she jest set t' work 'n' she prayed fer keeps! 'N' when her knees wuz a-gittin' numb she got up 'n' looked aout o' th' winder — 'n' thar stood th' hill — 'n' sez she, 'Thar! *Jest as I'xpected!*'"

Annie tried hard not to laugh at this narrative; but tried in vain. When she could command her voice, she cried: —

"The dear old thing! I can just see her gray curls bob up and down, as she says, 'jest as I'xpected!' Well — I'll warrant her faith was not a bit set back by her disappointment. Why can't we all be like her?"

"Oh, as we say in the prairies, 'some pork don't bile so.'"

Then, emboldened by her laughter, he thought he would venture to try a little "soft sawder" that would have made all lovely with some girls: —

"I did worship, a little, Annie, if I did n't pray much."

She looked up and listened, with renewed zeal.

"But it was an earthly being, or part earthly and part heavenly. My thoughts did n't soar away, they just stayed close by me!"

She gave his arm a little reproving shake, but made no other sign of hearing him or of being consoled.

From such an atmosphere of piety and peace, we turn to one of sin and violence.

Burr Hobbs, alias B'God Hobbs, in changing his sky had not changed his soul. Everybody in his new neighborhood, adjoining the Galena railroad, hated him as much as had everybody in his old Danfield neighborhood; and everybody said that John Felser would not have stuck to him so long, if John had n't been more "lowdown" in his way than Hobbs was in his.

Shrewd Western communities do not often make mistakes as to character; Felser was despised, Hobbs was detested, and Hobbs's wife was pitied; all in strict poetical justice. But the little world did not judge quite correctly the cause of John's prolonged endurance of his employer's brutality. It had to do with the sufferings of the other victim — Hobbs's wife. Community of en-

durance knits people together more firmly than community of happiness. The sympathy between these two had begun most naturally. On the occasion of one of his many quarrels with his employer, John had left Hobbs in the field, come to the house, and announced to the wife his determination to go back to Danfield, having written to his brother Balty for money to enable him to travel. The poor woman broke down completely at the news; and begged John not to leave her alone in that hell on earth — begged him with tears and sobs, and even tried to detain him by force from quitting the house. He persisted, and got a little way on the road — then returned, made it up with the poor thing, and went back sullenly to work; Hobbs never suspecting the agency which had changed his mind.

After this, there was much more seeming peace in the household; the passion-blinded husband never suspecting the secret understanding which consoled the other two, and they in their turn yielding to him an acquiescence even greater than ever before.

"Say, John," said Hobbs one day, when they were "shucking" corn in the field, "I'll bet I see Dolly Dutcher in the cars to the station when th' train stopped yest'd'y."

"Like enough. Her o' man, Jim Sanders, is the conductor of that train, so she kin ride all she's a minter, 'n' not cost her a cent."

"Should 'n' wonder. She wuz fixed up t' kill — store clo'es ain't no name fer it! The' dew

'llaow th't them conductors don't turn in t' th' road not a half what the' git — jest knocks daown a full half!"

"Fools ef the' did n't! I jest wish 't I hed half their chance. I'd sock it tew th' old corporation!"

"Ah yah! You 'n' me 's got t' work fer all we git — 'n' then hev it took from us by robbery * *!"

This led the monomaniac off on one of his tantrums, during which he stopped his work and stamped up and down among the corn-hills, waving his arms, shaking his fists, and shouting his curses, so that they might have been heard across the field, and further.

John worked on in silence, husking the hills on Hobbs's side of the wagon as well as those on his own. When the paroxysm was over, Hobbs came back to his work as if nothing had happened.

After a long silence, John said: —

"Did ye see the feller that wuz a-drivin' th' Pioneer that trip?"

"Yaas, I see'd him. See'd him afore somewhere."

"Don't ye reckleck the boy th't wuz with th' surveyin' party th't laid aout th' Springville road?"

"What! That boy th't fooled old Bose when I set him on them fellers?"

"That's him!"

"'N' wuz he th' feller th't wuz a-drivin' th' Pioneer when she killed my critter?"

"Same cuss."

"Wal, * * ef I'd a knowed that, * * I'd a skinned him alive * *!"

John made no reply, but he inwardly wished that Hobbs *had* known Phil; not in order that Phil should have got hurt, but that he, John, might have had the satisfaction of seeing Hobbs "git his belly-full" of punishment, for once in his life. His mind ran on to the hope that it might come yet. His was one of the low natures possessed by men who love to start a fight wherein their own skin is not endangered; and now, to see his oppressor suffer a bloody defeat would have been a double delight. So he went on:—

"That feller's name is Phil McVey. He boards to the Sanderses; 'n' him 'n' Dolly 'n' her o' man's thicker 'n' thieves."

"The h—ll you say!" Then after another sullen silence he added: "Dooz her mother know 't her own darter's a-layin' in with my enemies?"

"Haow sh'd I know?" (But John did know, for he and Mrs. Hobbs had talked it all over.)

"I'd like, * * t' blow 'em all t' h—ll — th' hull caboodle on 'em; 'n' the'r * * railroad on top on 'em!" And he worked on the rest of the day in a kind of stormy silence; and a fury that vented itself on his horses for want of any better object, in jaw-breaking jerks of the bits, and rib-cracking kicks in the body, and ear-blasting curses.

CHAPTER XXV.

MAID VERSUS MARRIED WOMAN.

It may have been observed that Phil's improper and unprofitable and (happily) unprosperous flirtation with Dolly Sanders had dropped out of sight.

But Dolly, meanwhile, was growing to be a very angry woman, and cordially ready to have Annie Masten go back to where she came from.

"The *idy* of my havin' my nose put out of joint by that little chit of a Annie Masten! *Annie* this, and *Miss Masten* that, and *Miss Annie Masten* t' other, day in and day out! It's a-gittin' played out!" And the dangerous Potipharean expression shone in Dolly's eyes as she thought of her wrongs.

Perry Fenton was to take them all to his temperance meeting on the coming Friday night — now she would see whether or not she was to be overslaughed like dirt!

At breakfast on the morning following the prayer-meeting, Dolly said sweetly to Phil: —

"The Cricket on the Hearth is coming to Rice's theatre Friday night."

"Oh, yes; to be sure! We were goin' to see that, were n't we?"

"Why, — that *was* the arrangement, I believe."

"All right; I'll see that you sha'n't be disappointed."

Off he went, and secured seats for the play. Then on his return from his regular trip on Friday afternoon, he simply gave his tickets to the willing Sam, and told him to tell Dolly that he should n't get home in time for the theatre, and she was to go with him, Sam. Dolly went, with a sweet and cat-like smile, and a blazing color.

"Phil could n't come, eh, Sam?"

"Not, by no means."

"He'll git raound in time to take in the temperance, I s'pose."

"You bet!"

And here Sam thrust his tongue into his cheek and winked his weather eye with an obtrusive slyness that might have knocked down a mule.

Dolly could hardly see the stage, and did n't at all know what Sam was talking about on the rare occasions when he could suspend his rapt admiration of pretty Agnes Robertson in her impersonation of "Dot," long enough to close his mouth and make a remark. Dolly's rage almost frightened herself: she had never felt so before; this must be remedied at any cost. The others had all returned from "the temperance" and retired before the theatre-goers got home. On the morrow Phil said: —

"Dolly, how did you enjoy the Cricket?"

"Oh, it was just splendid! Ask Sam! Did n't we have a good time, Sam? I'm sure *I* did!"

Sam proceeded to express himself in similar terms, but Phil had lost all interest in the matter and was hanging on some utterly trivial remark of Annie's about the heat of the hall at the temperance meeting.

On Phil's next Tuesday's in-trip to Chicago, a hard blow awaited him. The train-master said to him : —

“ Have t' double ye right back to Galeny to-night, Phil.”

“ Great Scott ! ”

“ Yes, — the Elgin is clean played out 'n' got to lay up, 'n' th' ain't a machine in the round-house but the Pioneer, 't' I kin send.”

Then, seeing that Phil looked cut to the quick, he added : —

“ Why, what's the matter? You always was right on it whenever anything turned up, before.”

“ Oh, nothing.”

“ Tell ye what I can do. I can give you a day over in Galeny, 'n' let ye run in a-Thursday.”

“ No, no! I'll double out to-night an' turn round an' double back in the morning.”

“ Jes' 's you say.”

So Phil took a bite while his engine was being turned and wood-and-watered, got another fireman, sent Sam home to tell the circumstances, and then ran his train to Galena. On Wednesday morning, the same series of operations having been gone through, he ran his train back to Chicago, — thirty-seven hours of continuous strain, — all rather than miss seeing Annie for a single evening and morning.

It ought to have been thirty-seven hours ; but poor Phil was two hours late in getting in on that Wednesday evening ; two long and trying hours. It was half past eight when he reached home. Dolly, in her pretty home dressing-gown, met him at the door.

" Oh, Phil ! Where *have* you been ? "

She gave him her hand, even left it with him, but he did n't do anything with it.

" They 're all gone to prayer-meetin', I s'pose. "

" Miss Annie Sparrow McVey Masten has gone to prayer-meeting. You need n't take the trouble to call her ' they all. ' I know who you mean as well as if you said it. "

" Well ! I don't know as I care much ! " And the disappointed, toil-worn man dropped into the nearest seat.

" I thought *I'd* stay and see that you had something to eat. "

" Don't know as I care much for that, either. "

" Oh, yes, you do, too ! You ain't half so near dead as you think you are ! There, draw up to the table and I 'll bring you some supper in a minute. "

He " set by, " and resting his forehead on his arm was sound asleep when she came back in five minutes with bread, and milk, and cold meat.

" There, wrap yourself gently 'round those, while I get you some eggs and a cup of tea. The kettle ain't quite to a boil yet. "

" Oh, thank you, Dolly ! Don't bother about anything else ; here 's more than I want. " And he drank off the bowl of milk at a draught.

"I know what you want a heap sight better than you do yourself: so don't interfere in what you don't know anythin' about."

Off she tripped once more. No sooner had she stopped speaking than Phil's head fell down on his arm again, and he fell asleep so quickly that he did not hear the door close behind her. There is something in the first sleep of the very tired watcher which is like the first hope of the despairing. It is so eagerly seized, and goes so far! Thus it was during the ten minutes that Phil slept while Dolly was away. These, with the five minutes of her former absence, refreshed him more than hours of commonplace dozing would have done, and quite took off the edge of his exhaustion. When she reëntered, he woke up of himself as she said: —

"Why, the poor baby! Was it so completely done up?" and she fondled his curls as she set the viands before him.

"Oh, I'm right as a trivet now," he replied, moving his head away. "I could run to Galeny and back once more on the strength of that nap — and this supper!"

Dolly watched him smilingly while he made a hearty meal. Then she said he must help her clear the table, which they did in a moment. Next Phil remarked: —

"Well — I guess I may as well step round to the prayer-meeting a minute!"

At this blameless and even praiseworthy suggestion, Dolly whipped her arm into her apron

and over her eyes in her old childish fashion, and burst into a passion of real tears!

"There! I knew it! You were only thinking of her all the while! You don't care for poor Dolly any more! Nobody does!"

"Why, Dolly dear! Yes, they do! We all do! There, there, there!" And he took her in his arms, wrapper or no wrapper, — unavoidably.

"You sent me to the theatre with Sam, so you could be with her."

"Well, well — stop crying now, while I tell you something! Stop, now! Stop, I say! There, there!" and he kissed off her salt tears. "You know the last time I talked sweet to you, you bluffed me — dismissed me — gave me my time — discharged me. Don't you know you did?"

"Some folks are mighty easy discharged! They want their walkin' papers — they're on the watch for them and take them by force!"

"Did n't you mean it?"

"Ye-es — I did then."

"But you don't now!"

"Ye-es — I do, too" — but she let her head lie on his bosom, her red, swelled eyelids turned up toward his face. "You know I told you I would n't have no chance, soon's Annie Masten got here!"

She observed a sudden loosening of his clasp as she mentioned her rival's name, but he answered:—

"And I told you it was n't so! That the woman did n't live who could make me forget you — and she don't!"

"Ferget! It's owin' t' what ye mean by ferget."

"Oh, well — you know she's nothin' but a child, and you and I are grown folks! That's the difference!"

"Then ye dew think a leetle bit of poor old Dolly yet?"

"Jest as much as ever I did. She is something new — that's all!"

"Never talked sweet to her, did ye?"

"Never thought of such a thing!" (This was true enough.)

"And ye won't make me jealous any more? I declare I be'n jist sick fer a spell!"

"No, indeed! Not if I can help it!" (He reflected that Annie was soon going home, and he could avoid giving offense to Dolly, meanwhile.)

"Well — what'll ye give me for a token that bygones is bygones?"

"I'll go and get you a pretty keepsake in the morning!"

"No; I don't want nothin' in the mornin' — I want suth'n' now."

Here she felt for his watch-chain, and finding the clasp she showed him what she must have — it was a piece of bright ribbon, frayed and crumpled, which Annie had trimmed off her belt a few evenings before, and had laughingly permitted Phil to appropriate.

"Oh, you don't want that! It's nothing but a rag, anyhow! Let me get you something nice in the morning!"

"This is nice enough!"

"Oh, see here, Dolly! That would never do! Suppose she should see you have it!"

"S'pose I'd show it to her? 'N' me a married woman! I'd be a fool! I jest don't want to see you a-wearin' it!" (Meanwhile she was deftly disengaging it.)

"Well — then, take it off 'n' burn it up."

"Oh, mercy! There they come!"

She stuffed her prize into her bosom, and ran away to remove all traces of the agitating interview, leaving Phil to receive the returning wanderers, which he did with some shame at his late faithlessness to Annie and to his new-forming ideal of manly conduct.

"Yes! I got home two hours late. Had supper and a nap, and am all ready for another day-and-night-and-day trip."

"Why — you *might* have come round," said Annie reproachfully. "Why did n't you?"

"Well — Satan kept me away, I suppose."

"Did he pay you well?"

"Regular wages."

"The wages of sin is Death."

"I expect to get it, too. All in good time." And he laughed aloud, while Annie looked hurt.

"Why, Mr. McVey, two days and a night, straight along, does you a world of good! We shall know what to do for you after this when you are sad and silent as you are sometimes!"

"Yes; double me back over the road two or three times without stopping! I wish it could

be to-night, through lightning and thunder — rain, hail, and snow — the wildest storm that ever blew — it would just suit me!”

“Would you really like to take me to Galena, to-night, on the Pioneer? Well, you’ll have a chance day after to-morrow.”

“Day after to-morrow is not my run out.”

“Well, day after that, then; because I *must* have one more last ride on the Pioneer.”

In the morning Dolly, too, was beaming and radiant. All her late clouds and pettishness seemed to have vanished.

“Why, Dolly, what’s come over *yew*. *Yew* have n’t doubled back over the road and done three days’ work in one, to my sartin knowledge.”

“Maybe not, Sam; but doin’ your duty and havin’ a good conscience ’ll keep your spirits up, without your goin’ in fer extra work. You jest try it some time!”

“Oh, yes; I’ll try ’n’ remember t’ make the experiment. I’ll tie a string raoun’ my finger to remind me.”

“Now, Annie Masten, what earthly use is it for you to be goin’ off, to-morrow? Looks as if you was n’t a-havin’ a good time at all! I’m real cut up about it!”

“Well, Dolly, you need n’t begin feeling *real* melancholy to-morrow — not till day after to-morrow.”

“Oh, law suz! I thought you said Friday.”
(This with some asperity.)

“Well, Phil says he does n’t run out to-morrow.

I thought his doubling would bring the Pioneer's turn round to Friday. Why? Does it make any difference?"

"Oh, nothin' particular. Only I engaged a woman to come and do your room up. But I can set her at something else; laws a massy knows there's enough to do."

"Well — Phil! How soon does your train start?"

"One hour and four minutes by the watch that regulates the sun." (Consulting his silver time-piece.)

"That's plenty of time! I'll go to-day!"

"Don't you do it," said Dolly, snappishly, seeing that her plan to separate the lovers was foiled; and "don't you do it," said every one.

"Mr. Fenton will be here to-night!"

"Well; so he will many other nights, no doubt. You all owe me a vote of thanks for introducing him to you. But I sha'n't be here to help entertain him. Sam, can you send a wagon for my trunk in half an hour?"

As Sam shrewdly remarked to Phil, on their way to the round-house: —

"Fact is, Annie is up to a thing or two, and can see as far through a millstone as most folks, when there's a hole in it."

But Phil heard him not; he was revolving Annie's refusal to wait for Fenton's visit — rolling it as a sweet morsel under his tongue.

The day was not so supernatural to Phil as the other had been, but far sweeter; for the intimate

familiarity of it — knowing each other's thoughts and feelings, choice of words and tones of voice. Once he pinched a stray curl that hung down her neck. She did not observe it, and he said: —

“I wish I had a pair of scissors.”

“What for?”

“I'd steal a bit off the end of this;” and he lifted the curl.

“Oh, mercy! It would be spoilt! I might as well take it off and give it to you — *it's boughten!*”

“No! Is it, though?”

“Why, yes; all the girls wear them — they are so neat and convenient. But that's the only one — all the rest's my own.”

She grasped her hair as she spoke, in the pretty, caressing, rearranging way of girls, and Phil was gratified to observe that she added this hurriedly, as if afraid of not getting due appreciation of her charms. It was so seldom that she showed a mundane weakness!

“By the by, Mr. McVey, I wish you'd throw away that foolish bit of my belt-ribbon. Oh — I see it's gone!”

“Yes, — I must have lost it off!”

He said this so lamely that she looked at him with surprise; but it soon passed out of her mind.

On the very next day, Annie set herself down and wrote Dolly the longest and sweetest and warmest letter of thanks that can be imagined. She went so far as to emphasize her gratitude by mentioning Phil's devoted kindness, and the fact that his acquaintance was one of the pre-

cious things she owed partly to Dolly; and she added: —

“Dear, dear Dolly, we must rely on you to carry forward the glorious work of bringing Philip speedily to the Fold wherein alone such a heart as his can find rest and peace. Will you speak to Mr. Fenton about it? Do, my dear friend!”

When Dolly read this, she inwardly observed:

“I guess I can fetch him to the Fold fast enough, without Oliver Hazard Perry Fenton’s help — or yours either, Miss Annie Sparrow McVey Masten.”

Bitter sarcasm was most frequently expressed by the excellent Mrs. Sanders through a very full enunciation of names and titles, real or imaginary.

Time went on, and Dolly had got rid of the dangerous Annie, yet still she was not happy. It was no longer difficult to defend herself against Phil. She found that in these days his runs as engineer and Jim’s runs as conductor always seemed determined to coincide. No matter how often she managed to change her husband’s trips from Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, to Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, or *vice versa*; still, somehow, by a doubling back of the Pioneer, or a day in the shop for repairs, they were sure to fall together again within a very few days. To be sure there were theatres and other gayeties in plenty, as in the old days; nevertheless, her escorts being both at home or both absent together, made things less gay.

Whenever he could make a decent excuse,

Prouder would take Phil all over the lead-works and all over his own lead hill. Phil's shrewd and practical comprehension of all the ins and outs of the business; his ready appreciation of all that was well planned and well carried out in any operation; and his perception of how errors and failings in the inception and working of any mine were to be cured or avoided, perfectly captivated the older man. Prouder had thought, as most men think, "a mine is a mine," and did not know, what is a fact, that no two mines in the world are alike. This fresh knowledge of the intricacy of the task, both men gradually picked up; Phil mastering everything first and imparting it to his patron as fast as he could take it in. The latter hung on his words as if they were inspired romance instead of the prosiest economics—drainage, natural and artificial, hoisting, transporting, smelting, digging, and ventilating; and other things too numerous to remember or imagine.

"Now it's no use to think of your staying a plain engine-driver all your days; and a plain engine-driver ain't in any line of promotion to be a superintendent, any more than my heel's growing to be my elbow!"

"Master mechanic's berth's worth havin'."

"How'd a nice berth in a graveyard suit you, with an epitaph 'died doing his duty, the oldest engineer on the road, aged 81, a-hoping for a master mechanic's position and a glorious resurrection!' How'd that suit you?"

"Oh, it'll be my own fault if I don't step down

off the footboard into the management before I'm 81."

"Well, take it another way. 'Accidentally killed doing his duty, the youngest engineer on the road, aged 24!' How'd that leave Mrs. Annie Masten McVey fixed to take care of the babes and look out for her second husband?"

Phil looked away and whistled softly.

"Have to take the babes back to the parsonage, would n't she?"

"See here, Uncle Zury; better n't we leave her out of the question?"

"Mebby I'd better; but I guess the trouble'd be to get yew to leave her out. Had n't ye rather keep her in the question and work for me on the hill, than leave her out and run the Pioneer? More fun to run Annie Masten than t' run the Pioneer, if I'm any judge."

"What d'ye think it'll be worth to you to have the mines opened and run?"

"Open 'em right?"

"Yes."

"And run 'em for all they're worth?"

"Would n't run 'em any other way."

"Well — what do they pay you now?"

"Over a hundred a month counting over time."

"What would you say to one fifty?"

"That would do fer a starter."

"And a rise at the end of the year?"

"That sounds like it."

"And a share in the business?"

"Now, you're talking."

"And your wife the richest woman in Jo Daviess County before you die!"

"Can't see that! There's men here with their sixty thousand to-day."

"Don't let that stall you, not a mite, my sonny! Sixty thaousan' ain't a circumstance to Zury Prouder."

"Zury Prouder's one thing, and Phil McVey's another."

"Jesso! Annie Masten knows the difference, I dessay!" (Zury knew what string to harp on now.) "But you keep dark and lay low — keep your eyes peeled and your ears tight open — maybe you'll hear something drop." And he pulled out the old breast-pocket-book, as if by accident.

From these oracular utterances Phil might easily gather that, for some reason or other, the great Zury Prouder (now a widower and childless) was charging himself with Philip McVey's future. Said he to himself: —

"Well; if he can stand it I can."

His absorbing desire to make that sweet saint his wife made him very hospitable to any prospect of ability to care for a family. But the next thing was, to make himself personally acceptable to her and worthy of her choice.

Toward this, too, he had taken a great step. He had succeeded in his plan of arranging a visit from his mother and sister to the Mastens; and in forwarding this, too, Zury was the willing agent, as we shall see hereafter.

“I wonder if th’ boy’s any fonder of th’ gal ner what I be of the boy himself! I don’t believe it. An old fool’s a bigger fool’n a young fool *can* be. Me, at my age, a-lyin’ awake h’yer a-thinkin’ abaout a boy! Ef it was his mother, naow — wal, come t’ think it’s both on ’em. Yaas; I’m an old fool — thank God I’m an old fool. But naow abaout this h’yer Dolly Sanders business: I’ve *got* t’ git him aout o’ thar, sure enough.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

HERE ENDETH THE FIRST LESSON.

NEVER had Anne been so hard and unsympathetic with Dr. Strafford as during the months following Phil's departure, and perhaps never so near to changing her mind suddenly and marrying him off-hand. As some one has said, the wounded heart is the most vulnerable; just as a fortress is least defensible when an earthquake has shattered its walls.

But Strafford only knew what appeared on the surface — extreme low spirits and seemingly causeless foreboding of indefinable evil. After some private consultation with Meg, whose cordiality increased as her mother's was withdrawn, he plucked up courage to attack the chimera dire — more impelled by Meg's wishes than by his own judgment. So one evening (by predetermined plan) Meg asked him to sing an old sweet song of his, "Oh, come to me." At the end of the second stanza: —

"But if the gloom of life has come,
If smiles have now forsaken thee,
Then let no pride attempt to hide
The dreary change, but come to me,"

he stopped and said: —

"Now, my dear friends — mother and daughter

— it is plain that gloom *has* come, and smiles *have* forsaken you. I know you won't 'come to me;' but can't we come together and face this thing?"

"I wish we could! Can't we, Mother?"

"What? Face the trouble? We do — at least I do. I face Phil's absence, night and day."

"But, Mamma, the mere absence — just a few miles of separation and temporary loss of dear Phil's dear company — is not enough to shut us up in a cave of gloom. The sacrifice is for Phil's good, and therefore for ours, is n't it?"

"I suppose so."

"Then why need you be so sad — so pale and growing paler; thin and growing thinner?"

"Oh, I don't know! May n't I be wretched if I wish?"

"Not without my consent. But then — of course — I'm only Meg!"

"Oh, my darling! I am wrong — I know I am — wrong and unloving and ungrateful — to my one unmixed blessing!" (Kisses and tears.)

"That's a pretty sight, even to an outsider."

"But, Doctor, you're not an outsider, or we would not behave so before you, should we, Mother?"

"No, my child. Still, perhaps we ought to be more decorous. Go and sit in your chair again, and let us ask Dr. Strafford's pardon for so far forgetting ourselves."

"Well; I'll forgive you the heinous offense, on condition that I may go on with the same sub-

ject. Why can you not be reasonably happy, instead of unreasonably unhappy?"

"I don't know. That is all I can say. I—don't—know."

"If I could get that nightmare by the ears, I'd—wring her neck."

"Are you afraid of any special thing, Mama?"

"Perhaps."

"What is it?"

No answer.

"You know," said Strafford, "what the country folks say about crossing Spring River before you come to it."

"Well, the man who gets to Spring River with no idea how to cross it is a fool."

"How about the woman who persists in getting into a boat long before the river is even in sight?"

"Yes," added Meg, "or wading in a puddle and getting her feet sopping wet! Before she even knows there is any river before her!"

"Oh, she's a fool, too, I suppose. I am a fool; thou art a fool; he, she, or it is a fool. We are all fools, perhaps. But then, for what is it that we cherish foresight? That is the power that marks the difference between a brute and a man! It ought to be our pride and glory never to be taken by surprise."

"True enough, and well said!" cried the doctor. "But, then how surprised you will be when all turns out for the best! When Phil fulfills his

manifest destiny and perhaps comes back and is master mechanic on our own railroad ! ”

“ I am willing to be suprised that way. But I cannot foresee it.”

“ Why not ? Is not Phil a splendid specimen of power, mental and bodily ? ”

“ Yes, indeed.”

“ Perfectly temperate ? ”

“ Absolutely faultless in that regard.”

“ Devotedly attached to his mother and sister ? ”

“ Well — moderately.”

“ Beloved by everybody ? ”

“ Too much so, perhaps.”

“ Sure of friends to give all his powers full play, and enable him to seize all chances ? ”

“ Yes — so long as you are faithful to him, above all ! ”

“ That means forever ! So while you are foreseeing, foresee these things ; and let the others take care of themselves ! ”

A deep sigh and a long silence were Anne's only response. Each knew that the weakest point in Phil's nature had not been touched upon — and could not be.

“ There's an old saw that runs somewhat thus : —

‘ In every lot are mingled joy and woe ;
To every life some miseries befall ;
But oh, what agony we undergo
From things that never happen after all.’

What have you to say to that ? ”

"I say that I'd rather have those agonies than the others — disappointments."

"Well; wise men, for a thousand years or so, have been warning each other against *borrowing trouble*."

"Yes; everybody tells everybody else not to borrow trouble; but takes precious good care to take trouble to-day that may lessen the pain of to-morrow — at least everybody of any sense does so."

"Borrowed trouble,
To-morrow you'll pay double,"

suggested the doctor.

"That's a poor couplet, full of poor philosophy. I believe I could make a better, myself."

Then the three laid their heads together and arranged Anne's views in a rhyme.

"It's well to borrow
Trouble and sorrow;
The cup you drink to-day you need n't drink to-morrow."

At parting, Meg summed up the situation: —

"Well, Doctor; we must say to mother what I once heard an elder sister say to a naughty, troublesome, obstinate little brother: 'Do as you've a mind to; if you don't I'll make you!' And so, much against his will, he had to do as he had a mind to, because there was no one to say him nay!"

As Strafford walked home, he said to himself:

"Her master-mind had the best of us, of course. How strong she is! I feel like a child before her, whether right or wrong. Even when I have the

last word, her very silence seems a pæan of victory."

He seemed to have brought away some of the gloom he went to dissipate, but managed to take more hopeful views before he slept.

"Give them time. To try too soon to change tears into smiles is like squaring 'round the yards too soon when the ship tacks; likely to throw her all aback again."

Twice, after this, a call he had proposed to make at the cottage was thwarted by the unconscious Zury Prouder. The widower had served out his two terms in the state legislature, and had "got enough of politics."

"Those fellers, or a good share of 'em, are so crooked that a line has got to have a bend into it before it looks straight to 'em. They say, 'Zury, he stands up so straight he leans over backwards!' Some of 'em have n't got a straight hair in their heads!"

He came back much less odd and angular than he went away; more like the commonplace world in dress, speech, and manners; but, Strafford thought, less interesting than in the days of his pristine quaintness.

On one evening Strafford had reached the door of the cottage; and on looking in saw the tea-table spread with what he well knew as "the best set;" and he easily recognized the farmer-statesman's strong voice, and knew that he was the honored guest.

He discreetly retired; at first only in good-

humored disappointment; but before he slept he found himself in a fever of absurd jealousy. Anne had known this man for years before she met him, Strafford. Zury was reported worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, and was without natural heirs. What would not a doting mother do to advance the fortunes of her children?

With this whip of scorpions he lashed himself through an almost sleepless night. If he had known that his supposed rival had (without the slightest encouragement) on that very evening, offered himself to the widow, had been (to his astonishment) deliberately and firmly and hopelessly rejected, and was writhing under direful torments in consequence; — if he had known these things he might have been spared some torments of his own; less direful than poor Zury's, for the latter was older and more "set in his way," and unaccustomed to defeat, so his disappointment came upon him barbed with surprise and mortification.

Next morning he met Zury, but did not at once notice any signs of the blow he had received. Said the latter: —

"Doc, do you happen to know a laboring man named Con Haley? His family's come all the way from Ireland, and now they can't find him."

"Why, — I think that name is on the railroad pay-roll. Come to the office and I'll look it up for you."

On their way they met Parson Kizer, and at

Zury's suggestion they asked the good man if *he* happened to know a laborer named Con Haley. He thought over his long mental list of names, but could not remember any Con Haley.

"Woman and two helpless babes stragglin' away out here to hunt for a needle in a haystack — or a grasshopper that lighted somewhere on the Grand Prairie several summers ago! Wal — we're all fools together!"

"Well, Brother Prouder, you know there's One who notes the sparrow's fall."

"Ya-as — and don't always think it worth while to pick the sparrer up."

"But Solomon says, 'I have been young and now am old, yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken, or his seed begging bread.'"

"Well — there's where I'm ahead of old Solomon. *I have* seen 'em; and many a one!"

"Trust in the Lord!"

"But pick your flint and keep your powder dry." And then Strafford did observe that he looked graver than usual; almost grim.

They found the name on the roll and the man on the road. Strafford fairly winced when he saw Con Haley taken to Polanders' store to be reunited with his family.

"Anne's work! The hand is the hand of Esau, but the voice is the voice of Jacob! *He* would never be occupied with a charitable task like that if *she* had n't put him up to it."

Herein he was partly mistaken and partly correct. Zury was turning over a new leaf — passing

a desperate and painful crisis — entering upon a new part of his life history — and this little bit of humanity had been spontaneous ; the first fruits of the change. But it was Zury's mortification at being rejected by Anne that had opened his eyes to his inferiority and occasioned the surprising new departure ; and so she was the indirect cause of the preservation of the Haleys by his agency.

The second blow the doctor got was some time later and like unto the first. There was sleighing, and Strafford saw Prouder's sleigh go toward the cottage, whence it departed after a call of most reasonable and unlover-like length. No, he had not been watching for its return — simply he could not help recognizing the gait of the horses as indicated by the sound of the bells. These things had no sort of effect on him, of course ; why should they have any effect ? Simply, he found it easier to stay away when it was evident that Mrs. McVey had " other friends."

When he did call, the gloom seemed to have been somewhat dissipated.

" Why, Doctor ! What a stranger you are ! Have you been away ? "

" No, — I think not since I saw you last."

" Well, then ? " — Anne paused. The questioning tone and the unspoken phrase of hurt wonder at his absence was balm to his sore heart.

" I have been — quite busy ; and I knew you had other friends."

" Other friends ? What other friends ? " Anne asked the question boldly ; but Strafford thought

he saw a slight flush steal over her cheek and temple.

"Many, I hope, abler than I; since I have never managed to be of much use."

As Anne seemed somewhat nonplussed, Meg took up the matter and said, in her own honest way: —

"Other friends we have, thank Heaven; but none so able and so useful and so — *precious* as you, Dr. Strafford."

"There, Doctor! I hope you feel properly answered."

"Well, Margaret; I *ought* to be sorry you have none more valuable than poor G. S. But I am afraid I am glad that I am the best — or that you feel so."

"We all feel so, because it *is* so, and we can't feel any other way. And we are going to put it to the test by asking a great favor. Now tell him, Mother."

"Well, Doctor; you seem to stay away from the house when we are at home; will you stay at it when we are away?"

"Could n't we reverse the arrangement?"

"Not very well."

"Well, then, count on me. This mysterious absence, I suppose, is a visit to Phil."

"You are the champion guesser! We shall be gone nearly a month."

"A month away!" He looked at her with sad face, in which she read his unspoken thought — that this would be to him a foretaste of the final parting.

"Well? You need n't look as if this were a sentence of perpetual banishment to a penal colony! What pretense! You have stayed away from us a good month when you might have dropped in any day; now to put on the aspect of a monument of woe at our going away, I call sheer hypocrisy! So *there* now!" And she laughed gayly.

"I am like the miser who buried his gold, and was happy over its hiding-place, — was happy for a long time after it had been all stolen, because he thought it was there. But do you know what he did when he learned that it was gone?"

"Felt relieved, and glad to be rid of it, I suppose."

"No, you don't suppose any such thing. He killed himself over the empty coffer-coffin."

"Well; don't commit suicide on our roof when we are gone, I beg of you!"

"Will you really feel so badly, just to know that the cottage is empty?" asked Meg, in a sympathetic tone.

Strafford only nodded his head slowly, sadly, repeatedly.

"Well, then; come and go with us. Or rather, join us while we are in Galena!"

Strafford brightened at this suggestion.

"Would you like to have me do so?"

"Nothing could be better! Could it, Mother? Why don't you speak, and urge Dr. Strafford to visit the north while we are there?"

"Of course, my love, we always enjoy Dr.

Strafford's company; he knows that. But we shall be at a friend's house, where we cannot expect him to find a home, too!"

"Oh, I can find a place to lay my head, somewhere in Jo Daviess County."

"That will be delightful! Fancy Phil's happiness at being with his friend — his patron — his pattern, and his benefactor, again!" cried Meg.

"But — what becomes of the plan of having me take care of the cottage? Is that to be left to its fate?"

"Why, Mother; why not have Mrs. Felser bring her husband and stay here?"

Annie remained silent, as if considering the question.

"Perhaps I may better remain here and care for things."

"The doctor has his own matters to attend to, you know, Meg."

"But, Mother! What matters can there be that can't wait on such a glorious plan as this? Phil, and Phil's new friends, and the doctor's own pleasure in the jaunt, and yours — everything seems to point one way."

"But, Mother? But, Margaret! Dr. Strafford is his own best judge as to his affairs."

"Oh, my affairs would n't suffer — but I think I'll stay and attend to this precious cottage."

"Nonsense! The cottage would n't suffer, either, now would it, Mother?"

"Not in the least. Balty Felser in his harness would scare a burglar into fits."

"But, Mother; no, I don't mean, 'but, Mother,' — I only mean that burglars don't attack poor folks' cottages unless they are insane, idiotic, feeble-minded burglars, jest the kind for Balty to smite hip and thigh, and put to the edge of the sword. Now Dr. Strafford will go, if you say the word. He is the most obedient of your children, I sometimes think."

Anne glanced at Strafford with a twinkle in her eye to see how he relished this, and saw that he liked it not at all.

"What word am I to say?"

"Say, 'Go, Doctor.'"

"Go, Doctor."

"I think I may as well," said Strafford, rising; "especially as it is getting late."

"No, no! Mamma means go to Galena. Now won't you do as we wish?"

"Galena — or Gehenna — if you both desire it." Then he thought to himself. "*Does* she wish it? Or not? If not, why not? If yes, why does she hang back? Perhaps for fear of encouraging my suit, or seeming to do so."

"You'll have to go, Doctor. Meg always has her way."

"All right! That settles it! I go, and joyfully!"

Then they were very merry, especially Strafford and Margaret. They made all sorts of plans, wild and tame. They would read Latin, Greek, and mathematics, play the jews-harp, convert the Monomonee Indians and teach them the polka,

astronomy, and the use of the globes, — also the utility of dill-weed for keeping people awake in church.

As Strafford was saying good-night at the door, he said: —

“By the way; why should n’t I escort you both up to Galena? It will be dreadful for you to travel that long overland journey alone.”

“Oh,” said Anne, “we are provided with company already.”

“Why, yes,” added Meg. “Did n’t we tell you? Mr. Prouder is going to drive us up in his sleigh.”

“Well, good-night,” he managed to say, in his usual tone of voice. If he had delayed a few seconds he could not have uttered the words so that they would pass unnoticed. As he left the gate he felt a positive physical constriction in the left side of his breast, and pressed his hand there to observe it scientifically. He said aloud to himself: —

“That action of the cardiac muscles is quite a noticeable phenomenon. I don’t remember to have seen it mentioned in medical science. Perhaps I’ve made a discovery! For all I can see at this moment, it tends to show that mental emotions have a more instant and unmistakable connection with the heart’s action than writers have been willing to admit.

“Now let me see — how should I formulate my observations? Take a man in sound bodily health, but mentally deficient — suppose we say

a born idiot — and let him live for months and years in a fool's paradise — say infatuated with a woman unworthy of him; who in turn is infatuated with a man unworthy of her; but rich.

“Let his eyes be suddenly opened to his absurd position — say somewhat as a sound sleeper might be awakened by having a pail of ice-water poured on his face.

“His first sensation is as if a strong, rough, boorish hand had clutched his heart and begun squeezing the life-blood out of it. This state of things seems to drive the vital fluids to his brain and eyes — he does not see quite plainly and perhaps staggers a little. Probably, in extreme cases, death occurs during this stage.

“Supposing him to survive this; his next tendency is to begin to make notes of his physical condition, and rearrange his thoughts by occupying them with it, in order to ward off the pain of falling back into the awful distress of his first awakening.

“While in this stage he will be likely to dread any cessation of muscular labor; to feel as if it might almost kill him to go home and go to bed as usual — in fact, to resolve to walk a dozen or so of miles before he dares trust himself with a moment's rest. So he passes by his own door (as I am doing now), and decides what particular road is the longest, darkest, loneliest, and best for his purpose (as I am now deciding), and then ” —

Rarely has a man been wearier, in body and mind, than was George Strafford, as he kicked off his boots, disrobed himself, and plunged sleepily into his bed, what time the stars were fading and the dawn brightening in the east. His last thoughts were: —

“Yes — this is all very fine; but how will the waking up be? Never mind — this is comfort anyhow! Sweet oblivion! Sweet, sweet obl —” and the rest was wanting because rest came.

How was the waking? Well, on the whole, decidedly reassuring, though he had, as yet, only one subject of thought.

“I believe I am a man, after all!” and he splashed the cold, cruel water over his frame with unwonted and unsparing vigor. Then as the coarse, hard towel restored the glow to his skin, he laughed aloud in new-found courage and power.

He breakfasted late, but with a relish. He sallied forth and — behold the lady herself approaching!

“This is almost too much! Shall I retreat? Shall I? Not a bit of it! There must be some limit to my force, but I have n’t reached it yet, nor near it. I’ll join her — and yet keep up my courage!”

“Good-morning, Mrs. McVey!”

“Good-morning, Dr. Strafford.” (“He does not call me Anne, although he might.”) “Is not this a lovely day?”

“Beautiful, outwardly; but morally clouded with a sad thought.”

"Indeed?" (Looking away in some trepidation.)

"Yes. I cannot go with you and your daughter to Gehenna — I mean Galena — after all!"

"Not go? What a pity! We should all enjoy it so much! You among the rest, I *think*."

"I more than the rest, I dare say; but it is not to be, I find."

"Why this change, if you will allow me to ask?"

"Oh — this you know is a world of change, interspersed with a few small bills."

"Oh, indeed! Is there a money consideration in it?"

"Possibly — indirectly, money may be the matter. Not that I should care a rap for the mere cash outlay. Not a rap! Money is a small matter compared with things of real consequence — as you will find when you reach my years."

"Reach your years? I like that! I should have to 'crawfish' to achieve that."

"Yes — I thought you'd like it. But I don't mean mere vulgar, almanac years. I mean years of thought, feeling, experience, discretion."

"Oh, being only a woman" —

"You'll never reach them? Exactly. You speak ironically — so do I, of course; and yet there is a sense in which a man of my age is older than — but pshaw! What nonsense we do get to talking when we moralize! What is the news from Phil?"

On this theme they had some talk; and then

Anne drifted back to the first matter they had broached; recurring to it more from curiosity than anything else.

"Perhaps you 'll change your mind again, and meet us at Galena after all."

He looked at her with half-shut, laughing eyes, and a mouth compressed to keep it from smiling, and only shook his head. The look and gesture said quite plainly: "Not if I know myself! I can stand a good deal, but not *that*!" Then he said aloud:—

"Oh, I shall not have a bad time at the cottage, I assure you. My room does well enough for an old bachelor; but your cottage will seem a palace by contrast. Why—here we are at your turning-point already! You diverge here, I believe; and my way lies straight on."

"I certainly turn here." ("But why should you not turn too?")

"Well, then good-day. We will consult about—the hegira, and I will take your instructions."

"Good-morning, Dr. Strafford."

He lifted his hat and strode away.

"She is older than when I first knew her, so many years ago!"

"He is older, and more of a man than he used to be. Dear fellow! If he would only—Dear Meg! Such thoughts never enter her sweet heart."

CHAPTER XXVII.

SHORT CHAPTER ; LONG SLEIGH-RIDE.

THE great day of departure arrived. Zury had been in town all the day before, making his final preparations ; and the cottage had been, for a full hour before daylight, all aglow with light and warmth, in strong contrast to the blue chill that reigned outside between the snowy ground and the starry sky. A steaming hot breakfast fortified the travelers for the start ; and some hampers of provisions had to be stowed in the sleigh after it arrived.

Strafford, gay, cheery, and efficient, had breakfasted with them, and now, as the east was reddening — hanging out its banners for its approaching lord — he stood at the gate to cheer them off.

“ See that one star, Margaret ? Almost the last one left ? Well, that is the North Star — that is to be your guide ; just as it has been to tens of thousands of other escaping slaves.”

“ Oh ! So it is ! Well, I shall be a good deal like the darkey in the song, ‘ Still longin’ for de ole plantation.’ ”

“ You blessed child ! I do believe there are tears in your eyes ! ”

"No, no!" But she sat down very suddenly and buried her face in handkerchief and muff.

"There, there! You're a dear girl, but you *must* be happy now! That's what you are *for*, you know." And his hand rested for a moment on her shoulder.

"Good-by, Doc."

"Good-by, Uncle Zury. I envy you the chance to give so much happiness to them. Good-by, Mrs. McVey. See that you have a splendid time and come back ready to tell all about it."

"Good-by, best of friends."

"Good-by, good-by — no, no, don't take off your glove! Oh, pshaw — how needless that is, to start with cold fingers!"

He shook them with friendly warmth, but no extra pressure; Zury's whip snapped, the bells jingled, the snow creaked beneath the runners, and they were gone.

"Nothing personal between us any more," said Anne to herself. "Never any more! Well, I am glad of it." But she sighed, once and again.

"Here endeth the first lesson," said Strafford, aloud, as he watched the diminishing silhouette. Before it had vanished, the tall form of Margaret rose above the rest, elongated by the peculiar effect of early winter morning light; and high over her head she stretched her long, right arm and waved her handkerchief; and as the huge red sun had begun to appear, its earliest rays just caught the hand and kerchief so that they gleamed like silver against the dim horizon.

Oh, if he could only be inspired to say and to feel, "Here beginneth the second lesson!"

But he was not. He only beat his hands together and against his breast; partly to restore circulation, partly to express a certain exultation at finding that he was once more a man and his own master. He reëntered the breakfast-room, closed the doors, brightened up the fire, poured himself another cup of coffee, sat down with his feet stretched toward the genial warmth, and asked himself:—

"Am I really all right? Yes— not a regret in the world! I could be groomsman— or give the bride away!"

When Hannerann came to clear the table she found him asleep in his chair.

"Doc put a brave face on it."

"He did not put on anything. He is a brave man."

"Did n't know but what he might give down some, come to part with such awful chummy chums as you and him have been, so long."

"Give down, indeed! There is no power on earth could make him less than a splendid man."

"Well— to be sure; but sometimes when a man hangs too much on women's ways and wishes, he gets kinder womanish himself, don't you think?"

"Now, Mr. Prouder, if you think you are going to get Mother to say anything belittling Dr. Strafford, or to let you speak slightly of him without standing up for him— you are mistaken!"

"May as well take ye both back home, if I've got any plan of that kind, hey?"

"Just exactly as well — only I know you have n't any such plan;" said Anne.

"Well — I guess I won't turn round jest *yet*." He laughed a quiet laugh, and they saw he had only been talking to draw them out. He went on: —

"I count George Strafford to be about the finest specimen of a man I ever came across. We galoots get to thinking that the city spoils men. Well, so it does — spoils 'em or makes 'em. When it spoils 'em it makes 'em worse than we are; and when it makes 'em it makes 'em" — he paused before uttering the admission — "it makes 'em better. Take Strafford, now; he knows more from books in a minute than I know in a year, and yet he don't put on any scollops about it. He knows the world about as well as I know the Grand Prairie. He can get all the money he wants, and not half try — I can't get a half what I want, try my best!"

"Well! I see that the country has not spoiled you so that you can't say a good word for another man!" said Meg, with a glow of appreciation. Anne squeezed her hand secretly, glad that she should hear the doctor so well spoken of — and that she should see Zury at his best.

"Oh, I'd be a fool to go back on a feller like Strafford! No man on earth I'd rather meet than him. No man I should deal with freer or more open-handed, knowing he would n't cheat

me if he could — no more than I could him if I would. Trust him anywhere. Like to spend an hour or a year with him — better than he would with me, I reckon, ignorant as I am."

"You have a great heart; that is better than book-learning."

"It takes both, my girl — all three, I should say, heart and head and book-learning, to make such a man as Strafford, is or such a woman as your mother is."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Prouder. I'm afraid you are flattering me."

"No," said he, with a long-drawn breath. "It's just as well to call things by their right names. Doc Strafford is as splendid for a man as Phil McVey is for a boy — or has been — and I can't say more for him than that."

The sun rose higher and warmer, the fences ceased to cast long shadows across the road. They lessened their wrappings to keep from uncomfortable heat. The horses kept up a steady trot, trot, along the almost level road, Zury driving, as was his wont, without a whip, with loose reins, and no checks; so that the steeds' heads could swing from side to side, or up and down, all free and easy; no constraint, save that of the collar and the pole.

"They'd do sixty miles to-day in this style, if I'd let 'em. But I'll hold 'em down to about forty, I guess."

At about the middle of the forenoon Zury halted at a place where a roadside brook showed

some clear water — a “riffle” that prevented its freezing. He took out a pail and filled, it calling attention to the riffle, meanwhile.

“See which way that’s running? Just towards where we come from. Now, about this time to-morrow I’ll show you another riffle that’ll be running the same way we are traveling. Know the reason?”

“Why — because we are going up hill to-day — though it seems all level — and we’ll be going down hill to-morrow at this time.”

“Well, that’ll be the fact about *us*. Now the fact about the water is this: what we see here is bound for the Ohio River, away south, and what we’ll see to-morrow will be bound for the Illinois, away north. We’ll cross the divide in the morning.”

“How interesting! When shall we see some that is going into Lake Michigan on its way over Niagara Falls and out through the St. Lawrence?”

“Oh, we keep too far west for that. Now, ponies, are ye cool enough to take a sup?”

As he approached the horses they bent their expressive ears toward him and gave the low whinny (“nicker” in the vernacular) that speaks so plainly the gratified expectation of the dumb brute.

“Oh, how I like to hear them do that!”

“So do I, so do I. There, there, boys! That’s enough for this time. More, when I come back. Now, girls, I’m going over yonder a piece, to

where you see that clump of hazel-brush. Perhaps I'll find some nuts. You can get out, if you like — and when I come back we might eat a snack of your good things, if you think best."

"But suppose the horses should start! There is nothing here to tie them to."

"You watch me a minute." He tied the reins to the sleigh, and then unhitched two of the traces. "Now you see, if they want to go they can — only they've got to pull the sleigh with their bits."

Zury came back with his pockets full of hazelnuts, stripping off the burrs as he walked.

"I wish we'd brought along the nut-crackers," said Anne.

"I did bring mine;" said Meg, and she whipped one of the obdurate looking little things into her mouth and cracked it instantly, between her strong, perfect teeth.

"So did I mine," said Zury, taking two nuts between the iron thumb and forefinger of his left hand and squeezing them with his right till one snapped its shell.

"What teeth, and what fingers!" said Anne. "I must be older, or younger, or something, than both of you put together; for I could n't manage one of these to save me from starvation."

"Well, if you'd milked, 'n' chopped, 'n' held plow as much as I have, likely your fingers'd be strong as mine. But I like 'em better as they are." And he looked smiling at the soft, pink palm, wherein she held some of the nuts.

"Oh, Mother ; I'll crack some for you. Here's a splendid, fat, white one! I'll crack some for you, too, Mr. Prouder, if you'll eat them." She looked playfully at him for a jocular reply to her challenge.

"Thankee, Margaret ; I guess I can crack all I need, myself."

"No! That is n't what you want to say. You mean that after they'd been in my mouth they'd be too sweet — cloying."

"Ah-ha-ha! Of course I'd have meant that if I'd only be'n smart enough to think of it. Now, Doc Strafford would have had that all pat the minute you gave him a chance, I s'pose."

"I don't know. I wouldn't give him the chance — and I doubt if he'd think of it if I did — or say it, if he did think of it."

"Oh, Doc Strafford ain't a born fool — nor yet an awkward, tongued-tied galoot. I guess he'd have said it if you'd have give him a chance."

"Oh, Mother! That reminds me — did you think to ask the doctor to write to you in Galena?"

"No. It never entered my head! I wish I had."

"Well, I did ; so I'll have the advantage of you."

"Won't you let me read his letters?"

"Well — perhaps — if you are very, very good. And he is going to send me every number of the 'Bugle,' as soon as it comes out. It is delightful, when you are away from home, to get something

or other by every day's mail, or as near that as may be."

"Every day!"

"Why, yes; have you forgotten that the 'Bugle' is to be changed to a tri-weekly paper? You heard that, did n't you, Mr. Proudler?"

"Yes; I heard some of the boys joking about it. One of 'em asked what it meant by a tri-weekly, and the other said it meant that as the 'Bugle' had managed to live weakly so long, it was going to try weakly to live on a while longer. It was a joke, you see. T, R, I, and T, R, Y, and weekly, weakly — similar."

"Oh, I begin to see;" said Anne, quite steadily; but Meg could n't trust herself to speak, and only hoped the sleigh did not shake perceptibly while she was struggling with her laughter. When she regained composure she went on talking: —

"And what do you think? They want him to take charge of the third page — write for it and make selections for it, you know."

"What did Doc say to that?"

"Oh, he told us that he would do it, if mother would help."

"Now, Meg, you know he said if we both would help!"

"That's true enough; but of course he was joking about my doing anything."

Zury looked rather keenly around at Anne and asked: —

"Wha' d' you 'llaow?" (He often fell back into his old vernacular dialect when much interested.)

"Oh, I told him I had graduated on newspaper-writing when my mother edited the weekly paper in the factory-town — and after that, when I wrote for other papers."

"Yes, Mother ; and he said that having graduated, you were just qualified to practice the profession."

"Humph! Anything settled?"

"Yes ; settled that I would n't engage to do anything. If I ever had something to say, I would say it — review books, if any came, and such things. Then we dropped the subject."

So sped the first day, and the second, and the rest. So considerate was their conductor of all womanly wants, so were they gently amused, interested, and led along the rather monotonous way. Into the valley of the Kankakee River and across it ; into the valley of the Illinois and across it, northward, always northward, day after day.

Zury knew every inch of the road, and had all his stopping-places planned out in advance. At fifty or a hundred miles from home, he would meet some denizen, call him by name, and be greeted "Hel—lo—Zury!" with a falling inflection, as if the encounter capped the climax of pleasant surprises, and words failed to express the sentiments of the speaker. We none of us know how much we are influenced in our regard for others by seeing how the world holds them. Respect, admiration, cordiality, liking — even affection — are all contagious, and Zury's two com-

panions could not but be warmed by the moral sunshine that shone upon him from young and old, rich and poor.

Sometimes during the day he would give them sketches of the characters they were to meet at night ; slight but graphic touches, humorous, pathetic, shrewd and caustic, appreciative, depreciative, apologetic — all as it might happen — which they could observe and verify at sight, and talk about during the drive next morning.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ZUBY'S \$1,000 BLUNDER.

"WHILST I was — kind of looking forward to this trip, I thought that some day when we run short of talk, I would tell you a little thing that happened to me once when I used to go to Chicago in the early days. But we don't seem to run short of talk any day."

"Well, let's play that on this particular dark, snowy morning, we have used up every subject in our whole list! Because we must not miss that story."

"It is n't that *I* want a change — only I'm afraid you may get to wishing you might unexpectedly find somebody else driving for you — day-before-yesterday, week-after-next, or some time."

"We are not tired — and don't want to be; so give us the story."

"Well, it's about what I call my thousand-dollar blunder."

"I did n't suppose you ever made a blunder!" cried Meg.

"Made 'em? 'Course I have; more than you could shake a stick at!"

"But — a thousand dollars! I hope it was not while you were poor like us."

"Poor? I had n't a dollar in the world I could call my own, and father was n't much better off."

"And yet you did n't lose heart nor courage?"

"No! I was only ashamed of myself. But as to the thousand dollars—well, that did n't trouble me, as you 'll see before I get through with the yarn."

"I would n't have believed it of you."

"What, making a mistake? Well, now I tell you that whenever I hear a man say he never made a mistake I say to myself, 'maybe that feller ain't lying, but he's talking the same way I should talk if I started lying.' I made a blunder, anyhow, and here's the way it came about.

"I had a colt of my own, and I'd handled her so much from the day she was born that she grew up ready broke, as they say; halter-wise, bridle-wise, collar-wise, saddle-wise—wise every way. Kind as a dog, smart as a mule, and handsome as a picture. She was one of those nags that travel one ear pointed ahead on the road and the other back at the driver. I rode her bareback and bareheaded all over the farm,—one while walking along nibbling and browsing, another while just jogging gently; then again skimming like a bird over fields, roads, fences,—anything—to head off a critter that did n't want to be driven. And then when I was driving other horses to mill or what not, Daisy 'd be sure to be loping along somewhere handy by, in case I might take some notice of her.

"Well; in those days we used to wagon corn all the way from Spring River to Chicago; a whole caravan of us going together to save expense and double up teams over bad spots — the Kankakee crossing and so forth. One trip, on the second day out, who should come loping along but Daisy, that I had left at home, safe inside what we call a 'legal fence,' eight rails high beside stake-and-rider. As she came up and whinnied at me, I could see by the marks on her legs and body that she had just naturally *climbed* that fence. I knew that she could never have jumped it, and I knew that father would never have let her out. Fact is, the old man just about thought that colt was his, like all the rest of my things.

"Well, I jumped on Daisy once in a while, just to please her, and cavorted up and down the line of teams; and she would just 'hump herself' to show off, I tell you! And when we got to Chicago, and sold our grain to Hubbard's warehouse, nothing would do for the boys but I must jump on Daisy and play some tricks and monkey-shines. A little crowd gathered and one feller bantered me for a price on my colt.

" 'Tew hundred,' said I.

" 'Give ye one-fifty,' said he.

" 'Tew-twenty-five,' said I.

" 'Oh, yer jokin',' said he. 'Ef I take ye up at tew hundred' —

" 'Tew-fifty,' said I.

" 'Done!' said he. 'Th' mare's mine! Ef I hed n't a stopped ye right thar, I'd a be'n plumb cleaned aout!'

“Well; you may think I felt pretty good. So I did until I came to one thing I had n’t thought of. I took Daisy by the forelock and led her into the feller’s barn, slipped his halter on her head, tied her to the rack, and shook down some oats for her; and she begun to eat. Then as I walked off, just laying my hand on her for good-by, she straightened up, forgot the oats in her mouth, and looked over her shoulder after me as well as the halter would let her. I could see the turn of her ear and the white of her eye, wide open and surprised-like — see ’em to this day. Then when she lost sight of me, she neighed, and neighed, and kept on neighing, I don’t know how long. In fact, I hear her yet.”

Zury put his hand up as if to adjust his cravat — or as if he felt a lump in his throat.

“Well, business is business; or was in those days. I had my two hundred and fifty dollars anyhow. Now I said to myself that if I took the money down home father’s farm would get it — swallow it up as a hawk swallows a junebug. Why not take in a little patch of Chicago land, to hold till I come of age? Chicago’s going to be no man knows what, but something great.

“I’d seen considerable of a crowd hanging around some kind of a land-auction — canal-trustee’s sale, or school-section sale, or something, and so I started out to look for it. I wanted to get out of hearing of poor Daisy’s screeching at any rate. Well, I found the place and watched things for a while. It seemed that they had got

it fixed up somehow for two fellers to do all the bidding so as not to run the price up to where it belonged. First man he'd bid two-thirty, and the second man would bid two-forty, and then the auctioneer would knock it down to number two. Next lot, the second man he'd bid two-thirty for it and the first man he'd bid two-forty, and that lot *he* 'd get quicker than you could say Jack Robinson. Finally the auctioneer sang out, 'Last lot to-day, gentlemen! What am I bid for it?' So I said to myself, 'Now or never, Zury!' So when the regulation two bids had been made, I sung out 'Two-fifty!' so you could have heard me a mile.

"The auctioneer looked flabbergasted for a minute. Everybody looked at me, and the old bidders begun whispering. 'Is that my lot or not?' I called. And the auctioneer, after looking at the other fellers a minute, sings out 'Sold at two-fifty to—what name?' 'Usury Prouder,' I cried, bold as a sheep. Then I clutched my two hundred and fifty dollars and began edging my way through the crowd toward the clerk's desk. Before I got there, the man I call the first feller came up, and said he:—

" 'Friend, are you working for Ogden?'

"Now thinks I to myself, 'Zury if you don't open your mouth you won't let out all you don't know.' So I just kept it shut and shook my head, and he went on. Said he:—

" 'Because if you ain't, I guess I want that lot worse than you do.'

“ ‘I guess not,’ said I.

“ ‘Well, it’s money that talks,’ said he, ‘and I guess I’ve got the cash that will prove what I say.’

“ ‘You calculate to offer me double my bid, maybe.’

“ He kind o’ laughed, and said, ‘No, not quite so bad as that.’

“ ‘Well, what ye got to say?’ I asked. ‘Out with it before I walk up to the captain’s office and settle.’

“ ‘I’ll give you five for your bid.’

“ I shook my head and started toward the desk, noticing at the same time that number two was ‘laying’ for me, as we say, and thinking likely he’d offer me ten dollars, and number one would make it twenty, and so on till they *might* come near to double my bid, after all. My feller saw number two, same as I did, and said he, in a hurry-like: —

“ ‘If I can keep you from dickering with the other party, I’ll make you an offer that will open your eyes.’

“ ‘My eyes are peeled, I thank you. What have you got to say?’

“ ‘I’ll give you a thousand dollars for your bid.’

“ ‘Say it again, and say it slow.’

“ He said it again.

“ ‘Show me the cash,’ said I.

“ ‘Show it to you? I’ll give it to you if you wish. Here Sile’ (turning to a bystander), ‘see

me give this gentleman a thousand dollars for his bid for lot forty, block twelve.'

"I took the notes and counted them — ten one-hundred-dollar bills, all good — and we pushed on toward the clerk's desk.

" 'Henry,' said my friend to the clerk, 'who was lot forty, block twelve, knocked down to?'

" 'Usury Prouder. Fifty feet front at two hundred and fifty a front foot; twelve thousand five hundred dollars. Cash is all in but yours and his, and I'm just waiting for them to close up.'

" 'Well, here's Mr. Prouder. He will tell you he has sold me his bid.'

"I nodded.

" 'And so you may lump it in with the rest and I'll settle for all.' "

Zury paused and glanced back to see the effect of his tale.

" 'Why! You take my breath away!' " cried Meg. "You really *made* a thousand dollars, by sheer accident? "

"Just blundered into it, like a blind, bald-headed, blue-bottle fly into a sugar-kettle! Let that be a warning to you, Margaret, never to buy what you don't know anything about. There was I, like a blamed fool, thinking I was buying a whole Chicago corner-lot for two hundred and fifty dollars, that would just pay for one foot of it! Nothing but 'bull-luck and awkwardness,' as we say, kept me from making a bigger fool of

myself than Simpson's mule that swum across the river to get a drink." ¹

"I'll remember your advice. The counsel is good, though the illustration of it — works the other way. What do you say, Mother?"

"Oh, I'm waiting for the nub of the story."

"The nub? What do you mean?"

"I know what she means," said Zury. "She is thinking what became of poor Daisy."

"Are you, Mother? Oh, of course Mr. Prouder went back and bought her and they lived happy ever after!"

Zury was silent.

"Don't ask him, Meg. I'd rather not know."

"Well — I was a little tempted to do it — now I wish I had — but two hundred and fifty dollars was more than she was worth, — and father would have soon forgot but what she was all one with the rest of the live stock — and business is business."

"Poor Daisy!" cried Anne. "After all your friendship — you led her into the dark stable, tied her up, and deserted her."

Zury moved uneasily, swaying backward and forward, looked to the right and left, looked at the sky, looked anywhere but at the speaker. Then he said in a voice somewhat strained and broken: —

"If she's alive yet, I might hunt her up — and take her home."

¹ As this bit of Zury's experience has already been given to the world through *Ehrick's Monthly*, it is only published here by permission.

"She ought to refuse ever to look at you again!" Then after a pause: "Is n't the snow very trying to the eyes to-day?" And she dropped her veil and was silent for a long, long time, and Meg had the task of keeping up a semblance of gayety without help from either of her companions.

But why dwell longer on this sleigh-ride, or the Galena visit? They reached the plain and hospitable Galena parsonage joyfully. They had one trip to Chicago, where they stayed a day or two with poor Dolly Sanders, giving and receiving painful impressions. They completed their Galena visit with only one drawback — the regret that it must come to an end. They returned to Springville with this one regret darkening their mental horizon. But are not all these things written in the book of the chronicles of the King of Spring County, even Zury, the meanest man therein?

CHAPTER XXIX.

QUITE LITERARY FOR THE PRAIRIES.

DURING the Galena visit, Meg, our dear Meg, the unfailing doer of duty, was very far from failing to keep her promise to write to Strafford. In due season he received an answer to his first letter, in the shape of a missive so gay, so full, so naïve, so frank, so graphic, so characteristic and conversational, that one on hearing it read in Meg's voice might have thought that she was talking her impressions instead of writing them.

On getting this letter, he was moved with a sudden impulse: he went to the struggling tri-weekly and said that he would serve for a week or two in charge of page three, as a volunteer, no money to be asked, unless the employment should turn out so satisfactory to both parties as to lead to a regular contract. Then he erased a few purely personal matters from Meg's letter and published the rest entire, over the signature, "Mc."

"Why, do see!" said Margaret to the assembled tea-table. "Here's a letter in the Springfield paper dated in Galena! Why — what — Mercy on us!" And she crumpled the "Bugle" in her hands and fled to her own room, where Anne

found her a moment later holding the paper behind her and looking out of the window.

"Why, Margaret! What is the matter? Has Dr. Strafford dared to publish your letter without your consent?"

"I suppose so, mother. I don't dare to read it — I am so — surprised."

"It was taking a great liberty! I should not think it of him."

"But, Mamma; he did not mean anything out of the way. He asked me to write for the paper, and I consented ironically — he might have thought me in earnest."

"Let me see it;" and she took the sheet from her daughter's unresisting hands. Meg went on looking out of the window in a kind of dazed apprehension — she did not know how long — till she was roused by hearing applause and laughter from the tea-room down-stairs, followed soon by Annie Masten's pattering footsteps on the stairs, and by that young enthusiast's bursting into the room.

"Oh, you dear authoress! Your letter is perfectly splendid! Your mother is as proud as proud, and she is going to read it all over again, because we could n't take it all in at first! Now, come down and hear it!"

So the blushing girl was dragged down to make part of the audience, and to feel for the first time the delicious sensation of hearing outside appreciation given to one's own thoughts and words. Strafford's artistic touches and amendments had

put the finishing gloss upon the article; and it lost nothing by being rendered in Anne's rich voice and animated delivery.

Meg was forced, herself, to join in the laughter that followed the reading, and could not even affect to make light of the work — if she ever affected anything. All she could say in deprecation was: —

“Oh, give half your congratulations to Dr. Strafford and half to mamma, and I will be contented with the rest.”

But she spent the evening in a sweet exaltation. If she did as well as that when she did not try, what could she do when she really tried? And a hundred thoughts flashed through her mind which she might use in future.

Even her dreams that night ran in the same channel, and disturbed her sleep. At one time she knew she was dreaming, and thought she had conceived of a brilliant thing to say in her next letter — woke up seizing the idea by main force — studied it out to fix it in her memory — and found that it was the merest stuff; words without meaning, and phrases having neither head nor tail, nor body nor limbs. “I wonder if it was *all* a dream,” she whispered to herself. But, no; the waking memory was actual reality; it was only the sleeping dream that was a phantom. Perhaps if she had had more literary experience she might have known that the two kinds of visions are much alike in the long run.

The various comments of her various friends

were each characteristic of the critic. The clergyman, Mr. Masten, and Zury Prouder both looked at it as a mere infantile beginning, comparing with real "fine writing" as a mushroom with a church steeple. Said Masten: —

"Our dear young friend does well to begin so humbly and on such trivial things. She is laying, perchance, a broad foundation for a grand and splendid superstructure."

"Oh, come now, Father!" protested his daughter Annie. "I know what you are thinking of. You are thinking of your sermon on the Nature of Sin, and its Enormity in View of the Great Scheme of Redemption — now own up; are n't you?"

"Annie!" said her mother, chidingly. "Please keep all your undutiful jokes until we are alone! I should not like our friends to know how badly I have brought you up!"

Annie's pretty under lip went out in a rebellious manner. Her father remarked in his didactic phrases: —

"If our daughter had fully profited by that particular discourse, and others, it might have been more blessed for her and for her parents. I have done my best." (A sigh.) "The rest is in the hands of a higher Power."

Annie jumped up, and putting her arms around his neck, kissed away his frowns.

"Don't be afraid, Father," said she. "I am not half so bad as I pretend. I promise never to bring down your gray hairs in sorrow to the

grave; because" (she stroked his whitening locks) "because it would leave you nearly bald."

A general laugh showed that she was restored to favor, so she became presumptuous again.

"I don't like to have you talk as if Meg's letter was n't good already, but only a promise of something good some other time!"

"But that's what is the fact, and what I say myself," said Meg.

"Well; you may say it, but if anybody else says it" — a small, clenched fist raised in the face of the whole world indicated the fate awaiting such hardihood. "You see, Father, you might send your sermon on the N. of S. and so forth to forty papers, and not one would print it unless you paid it for doing so. Now, here a paper prints Meg's first letter, first thing, and is glad to get it!"

The minister was embarrassed by his too frank daughter; but Zury came to the rescue.

"That only shows that the best goods don't often fetch the best price. An old rooster'll fight his way through summer and winter; but a worthless spring chicken'll fetch twice his price in the market."

A few days later came Strafford's letter assuming (with some temerity) that the publication had been authorized, and saying that the letter had aroused much attention and interest; had been copied by other papers (a rare honor for the "Bugle"); and, best joke of all, *had been attributed to Mrs. McVey*. Also, that he would not

take upon himself to correct that natural error until he should be instructed by the writer, herself.

"Oh, you must n't let them do Mother such an injustice as that!" wrote the pleased and flattered girl, and began at once on her second letter for the "Bugle." After much effort and several revisions, she sent it off. She had a rather bad quarter of an hour when Strafford's answer came, saying that the letter was only fairly good; not so good as the first. He cut it out and pasted it on a sheet broad enough for marginal criticism, and gave his views in a running commentary along the edge. *This* phrase was forced and artificial. *This* word was a poor Latin synonym for a good Saxon monosyllable she had used in her first letter. *This* paragraph was moralizing and didactic — instead of making a simple, direct statement of the thought, leaving the reader to draw the moral; and so on. To emphasize the lesson, he sent a similar exemplification of the first letter; pointing out the features of freshness, unconventional vivacity, wit, and wisdom; and to prove his correctness, told her to have her mother read the second to the same audience as had heard the first, while she, Margaret, should note the effect. So said, so done. Masten and Zury thought it "finer" than the first, and all approved of it entirely; but nobody broke into spontaneous applause or laughter.

This was the first of many lessons in literature that passed between those two, and their sym-

pathy grew with the giving and receiving of knowledge. The writing madness seized upon the young woman, and she lived in "the mood of composition" which Willis calls truly the happiest frame of mind of which human nature is capable. She grew bold with action, and after the return to Springville, took the main part of the work of the much admired "third page;" which, by the way, became a marked feature of life in all that region of prairie.

"Now, Doctor; why don't you let Balty bring all the exchanges up to me? Scissors are a woman's weapon, and flour for paste is cheap. Why spend your more precious time on such lubbard labor as clipping from exchanges?"

"Why, Margaret; for two reasons. In the first place, I am afraid the confinement would be bad for you."

"Afraid I'll pine away? Do I look like it?" And she threw back her head in a fine exultation of youth, health, and strength. Her dark cheeks glowed with young vigor; and her eyes had begun to take on the observant, slightly quizzical expression that springs from an unlaborious devotion to the sport of "shooting folly as it flies."

"You look pretty well, so far, I am glad to see." ("And almost handsome; you fine specimen of young womanhood.")

"Oh, I love it all! I love the inevitable approach of the Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. I love the smell of the damp paper and greasy ink. I love the proof-reading, and the

typographical blunders that creep in after all. I wish it might never change from just what it is now!"

"The young enthusiast in journalism! What I wish is, to preserve your enthusiasm — not exhaust it all in a few weeks or months."

"Oh, don't be afraid of that. My mental muscle needs more exercise. Send up the exchanges and let me try to get *good*-and-tired for once! What was the other reason you had for doing the lubbard labor yourself?"

"Oh, I am afraid your original writing would be lessened by your devotion to mere selection."

"Well—if yours is increased" —

"Aha! That would not be an equivalent. Don't you know that your writing is better than mine?"

"What? What nonsense!"

"Which do you find oftenest quoted in the exchanges, Miss Modesty?"

"Why, my squibs, of course; but that is only because they *are* squibs, and local hits. Your work is the solid value, I am sure. You are joking about mine!"

"Well, my child; mine is what anybody can be taught to do; yours is personal to yourself."

"You taught me mine — what little I know comes from you."

"Oh, you may go on thinking so, if you like — but the fact remains that though I am the better critic you are the better writer. I have taught you nothing save a few matters of merest form —

Prouder would take Phil all over the lead-works and all over his own lead hill. Phil's shrewd and practical comprehension of all the ins and outs of the business; his ready appreciation of all that was well planned and well carried out in any operation; and his perception of how errors and failings in the inception and working of any mine were to be cured or avoided, perfectly captivated the older man. Prouder had thought, as most men think, "a mine is a mine," and did not know, what is a fact, that no two mines in the world are alike. This fresh knowledge of the intricacy of the task, both men gradually picked up; Phil mastering everything first and imparting it to his patron as fast as he could take it in. The latter hung on his words as if they were inspired romance instead of the prosiest economics—drainage, natural and artificial, hoisting, transporting, smelting, digging, and ventilating; and other things too numerous to remember or imagine.

"Now it's no use to think of your staying a plain engine-driver all your days; and a plain engine-driver ain't in any line of promotion to be a superintendent, any more than my heel's growing to be my elbow!"

"Master mechanic's berth's worth havin'."

"How'd a nice berth in a graveyard suit you, with an epitaph 'died doing his duty, the oldest engineer on the road, aged 81, a-hoping for a master mechanic's position and a glorious resurrection!' How'd that suit you?"

"Oh, it'll be my own fault if I don't step down

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".

phrases to avoid, things to leave unsaid, and so forth."

She mused in silence ; her eyes unconsciously fixed on his face, and a half smile hovering about her lips. Then she said : —

"How strange it all is ! I suppose a cage-born bird feels somewhat so when he first learns the use of his wings in the free air of heaven."

"Are you happy ?"

"Perfectly ! Not a wish in the world ungratified, — now."

"Why *now* ? Did you use to have one ?"

"Yes ; a hopeless longing — a despairing, desperate want."

"For what ?"

"Oh, — something. I believe I'll confess it to you ! If I had a single bit of it left I could n't reveal it to save my life ; but I have n't."

"What was the desire of your young heart ?"

"Beaut —, no ; I won't say that — passable good looks."

"And now you don't care to be — other than you are ?"

"I don't care *that* for it ! " And she snapped her fingers at Fate and the world. "Send me up the exchanges !"

As Strafford walked home he said to himself :

"Well, she is right. Who would have her any different from what she is ? Not I, I'm sure." Then, after a pause : "I always did like old maids, and always shall."

CHAPTER XXX.

NEVER MIND, DEAREST GIRL!

ONE evening Strafford was bidden to the Springville cottage for one of "the McVey tea-parties," a feast made special by a ham from the Prouder farm. A gay feast it was: Anne furnishing the matronly grace, Meg the girlish gayety, Strafford the educated man-of-the-world small talk; and, last, but not least, Zury the Great, bringing a shrewd common sense, an originality, a new-country freshness and vigor that were as stimulating as the prairie breeze — and besides all this a faculty for appreciative listening that seemed to put the others at their best.

Not long after the return from the Galena trip Strafford observed several of the fine Prouder teams, with sled-loads of splendid dry hickory, driving toward the McVey cottage; Zury himself superintending the transportation. Zury called to him:—

"Doc! *Oh*, Doc! Jest a half a minute, ef *yew* please!" (Strafford knew that his friend was in a fine, jocular humor by his forgetting "fine talk" and tumbling back into dialect.) "It's this-a-way. Mis. McVey did n't say whar she'd have this h'yer wood piled — when she ordered it. Ef

it wuz mine, I'd consider it the ha-an'somest winter ornament a haouse c'd have; an' I'd pile it right near t' th' front gate whar everybody passin' 'd see it. Beat a flower-bed all holler! But—I guess—lookin' at it by an' large—we 'll drive raound 'n' stack it handy t' th' kitchin door, don't ye think?"

"Yes; that will be best," and they drove toward the back gate. "She can't say but that you 're a good provider."

"Ah, young man!" laughed Zury; but checked his impulse to indulge in exultation.

"This will just suit me," added the doctor. "And I'll tell you why. My desk-work is half killing me—I'm getting soft for want of exercise. I would n't like to be seen every day chopping in Mrs. McVey's front yard—but I'm going to cut up that wood!"

"You! Tackle that thar dry shag-bark? Wal—I'd like t' see ye when ye tuk a holt; 'n' still better when ye let go!"

"All right! I'll be on exhibition every afternoon for a solid hour just before dark, doing that very thing! No charge for admission, only keep out of the way of the chips! I just long to start on the job! As Paddy said of his foe: 'Hould me or I'll be at him!'"

"I'll bet another load of it that before it's half done you'll have Balty Felser hacking at it, back-brace and all."

"Done! I take you up. Send the load down to my house: if I cut every stick of this, I owe

you nothing ; if any other man touches it with my consent I'm to pay you two prices for the load."

"All right, Doc. I don't want to kill ye; but it 'll be worth a cord o' wood to see ye blister your hands the first day."

"Ha-ha! I'll give you leave. By the way, the bet is n't lost if I take a saw."

"A buck-saw? Well, I thought as much! It takes a college-edicated man to bend over a saw-buck when he might be swingin' an axe!"

"Come, now, Mr. Prouder; do you want to make another bet? Will you lay another cord of wood against the worth of it that I can't make my saw beat your axe?"

"Don't want t' rob ye, Doc. Mebbe ye never see me swing an axe."

"Never; but I'd like to."

"All right. When I fetch that load to your house, I'll come on up h'yer with you and we'll have a little tussle; my axe against your saw."

All this time they were busy ranking up the wood the teamsters were throwing off. Zury watched the younger man with professional eye, and admired the supple strength he showed; while Strafford in his turn marveled at the iron muscles and thorough, trained facility of the life-long woodman.

"Why, good afternoon, ladies, Mis. McVey. You see I fetched over the wood you ordered."

"I ordered?" she said, flushing perceptibly.

"Yes; and you see I got Doc Strafford to help

me rank it all up nice so you could n't have the heart to say it was n't as good as you expected and must be took back. Besides, piled the way it is you can't see the poor sticks."

"Mrs. McVey, you need n't be at all alarmed. There is n't a poor stick in the whole lot."

"That's right, Doc! You see, ma'am, that's what we agreed he was to say. But in case you should be disappointed in the quality, I've worked a little scheme for gittin' it all cut up fer you. I've bet the doctor he won't cut it, and he's bet me he will. Says that if any other man cuts a stick of it with his consent he loses his bet to me. Is that the whack, Doc?"

"Yes, that's it; and Mrs. McVey and Margaret are to be my witnesses."

"Well, between you I believe you two men have conspired to spoil us two women! Come in, Margaret, and let us see what we can find for the conspirators to eat."

Thus was another gay evening inaugurated. Still another was a week later when the trial of the issue of saw versus axe was decided. Greatly to Zury's surprise and somewhat to his mortification it was a drawn battle as to the result. The smaller sticks gave way soonest to the axe, but the larger to the saw.

"Do you know what you two remind me of? James Fitz-James and Roderick Dhu."

"Well, Margaret," said the nettled Zury; "that'll do; but I thought you was going to say it was knack against awkwardness, maybe."

Anne saw his chagrin and hastened to the rescue.

"I don't think you ought to call Dr. Strafford awkward!"

"Him? No, it's me, I meant. Handled an axe all my life and fooled at last."

"You, awkward with that axe!" And she laughed gayly. "Why, I believe you could split a hair!"

He smiled in turn, and answered good humoredly:—

"Well—draw a hair-line across that stick and see how near I can come to it."

She whipped out her book-keeping pencil and ruled a fine mark on the smooth surface. Zury swung the axe with perfect nonchalance, struck it deep in the stick, and left it sticking there.

"Now where is your line?"

Not a speck of it visible on either side!

"Splendid!" cried Margaret. "Now see me try." She lifted the axe high up—then gently brought it down and *fitted* the edge into the cut. "There, mine was as accurate as yours!"

"Good enough! Give me a woman's wit against a man's strength any day! Want to try it, Doc?"

"What, woman's wit against man's strength? No, thank you; I've tried that and got beaten."

"I'll warrant ye! But do you want to try to strike that mark?"

Strafford considered a moment and then said:—

"Yes—I think I can hit it." He raised the

axe and brought it down with a resounding whack, striking the mark — with the back of the tool.

“Good again. Both of ye have beat me. Lemme see, lemme see — I’ve got to get even with ye somehow.”

They went in, supped as usual, and spent one of their usual jolly evenings. Before they parted Zury said : —

“Lessee, what were the terms of the bet between Doc and me? Who remembers?”

“Why, if I cut the wood I win; if I don’t, you win.”

“Yes — something like that — how was it worded, Mis. McVey?”

“If any other man did any of the work, with the doctor’s consent, he lost. And oh! Has n’t there been another man working at it with his consent this very afternoon?”

Great laughter followed this discovery; and Anne fairly glowed with delight to see her old friend come out, as usual, “top of the heap,” after all; while he — well he was more pleased to see that *she* was pleased, than even with the little triumph itself.

Strafford, too, was well content, because after he got home he again, for the hundredth time, asked himself if he was surely free from his old enslavement — and answered unreservedly, yes! Let those two seniors be happy if they could! He rejoiced in their happiness from the bottom of his heart, and would do everything in his power to forward it.

And Meg. Is she the only one of the quatrain who is left out in the general joy? Oh, well, you know Meg was always so self-poised, so self-sustained, so strong in her calm, smiling equanimity that nobody need give any thought to *her* feelings!

The next following number of the "Third Page" (this being the name by which the "Bugle" was now known in our little circle) was unusually good. But then Strafford and Margaret always observed that this was sure to be the case whenever Zury had spent an evening with them.

While the two scribes were in the cottage editorial sanctum, Strafford asked:—

"How is it, Margaret? How does he help us so much?"

"Well, as nearly as I can make out, it is the *tone* he gives our thoughts. If I read much, the T. P. grows eastern and literary. If I leave it to you, it is scientific and political; but when Mr. Prouder is the inspiration, it is frontierish, quaint, common-sensical, shrewd, strong, gay, and—I don't know what all."

"You are loading a good deal of quality on a rather small wagon!"

"Oh, don't laugh at me! Of course I don't suppose any earthly being except myself could see all those things in my few poor paragraphs—unless perhaps it might be Mother—or you!"

"I do, I do! Honestly and without jest or

flattery I do see all you speak of, and more ; my dear — Miss McVey ! ”

“ Well, then, I forgive you. I forgive everybody everything.”

She turned from him, dipped her pen in the ink, and bent low over the paper before her. He went on reading something, until observing that the sound of her writing had ceased he looked up, just in time to see her snatch her handkerchief from her pocket to “ sop up ” a drop from her paper — a tear.

“ Why, Margaret ! I have hurt your feelings ! ”

“ Oh, no — it isn’t that. It is something I can’t tell you.”

“ There ought not to be any such thing between you and me ! ”

“ No, not about things strictly my own affair. I would tell you any such in a moment.”

“ Some one’s else ? aha — I can guess it, then ! ”

“ Can you ? And can you take it so coolly ? ”

“ Coolly ? Why not ? ”

“ Oh — I don’t know. I used to think things might be different. I thought — I hoped — *you* might be the one to make them — different.”

“ Well, my child ; I thought and hoped so too. But your mother was right, as she always is ! What do I not owe to her for saving us both from a blunder ! I won’t say from a very dreadful blunder, because we should both have done our duty and lived our lives faithfully and cheerfully ; but it would have been a blunder all the same.”

"You take it with horrid philosophy!"

"Oh, it has taken years to make me philosophical about it. Time — time is the only medicine in the world that cures everything, unless you fall into the error of not taking a big enough dose!"

"How grand it must be to be a man, and a philosopher!"

"You must be a woman and a philosophess!"

"I'm afraid there is one great difference between them. A philosopher glories in his title: philosophess regrets hers."

"I don't believe it! Give it a trial! Begin by telling me the facts about the matter in hand."

"Well — I might; because mother told me to do as I thought best about speaking to you."

"Capital! Think best to tell me; now *do*, please!"

"Are you sure it will not hurt?"

"No, not sure. There may be some dregs of pain in the bottom of my heart that the timey balm has n't washed out. If so, we'll try rinsing it with a few drops of vinegar. Go on with the vinegar! Pour it in unsparingly! What's philosophy if it shrinks from truth?"

"Oh — I hate to hurt you! Some other time will do as well. And then we may all be struck by lightning before the time comes."

"But don't I tell you I want to be hurt? I yearn for it — long for it, as one longs to have a bad tooth out of his jaw."

"Well — after saying no, in words and actions, for a long time, mother has said she would see about it! You know Mr. Prouder has bought a lead-mine at Galena and is going to take Phil off the railroad and give him a share in the mine; Phil to run it and live there, and, we hope, marry Annie Masten. Then we think of — going up there — I don't know whether to live there or not."

She covered her face with her hands and was silent a moment, then recovered herself and went on.

"Last month, just after we got back from Galena, Mr. Prouder — Mother told Mr. Prouder that she would 'see about it' after we get up to Phil's home on the Red Hill, if we ever do get there. What did he do but send her, forthwith, a lot of Springville gas stock — enough to give her an income of three thousand dollars a year for life!"

"I hope she took it."

"No, indeed! She returned it at once, saying that they were not engaged, or something equivalent. And then he sent it back again, protesting that whether engaged or not 'live, or die,' he never wanted to see it again."

"He's a fine fellow! How he has been changed and improved by her influence! What did she do?"

"Oh, of course she was touched by his devotion. She has heard other evidences of his having turned over a new leaf and taken new views

of life and money. So, though she refused the gift firmly, she did it gently ; in a way that seems to encourage his hopes."

" Well — his hopes ought to come true."

He got up with bent brows and clenched hands, and paced the little room, its whole available pacing space being four steps one way and three the other.

" How about philosophy, now ? "

" Oh, philosophy is all right. Every struggle is glorious when I have that for an ally. Every wound is wholesome and helpful — clears the brain from follies and the heart from griefs. There ! I am all right ! " And he threw himself into his chair again.

" I 'm glad to hear it."

" Yes — all right ! I am smiling at Fate ; but you can't see that my smile is not a forced one, while you keep your head turned away like that."

" Well — I am not smiling, so I will not turn round."

" Do look round, and do smile ! Begin to be a philosophess ! "

" Oh, no ! I cannot ! "

" Don't you want your mother to be happy ? "

" Yes, but not without me."

" Don't you want to be a rich woman ? "

" No, not without her."

" How narrow ! "

Here she broke down, and her tears flowed afresh. She said, between her sobs : —

"Yes — narrow and selfish! But — don't you think — the outlook — is a little — lonesome — for me?"

"Lonesome, Margaret? No, indeed! You have your profession, does that count for nothing? And do I count for nothing to you?"

"Where's my profession when I move to Galena? There is no Third Page there! And no — literary guide — and — philosopher — not to say friend!"

"Margaret, I am almost old enough to be your father, but would you, to escape such loneliness, marry me?"

She was silent, and he reached for her disengaged hand and clasped it warmly. She let it lie passive in his grasp — alas! *he did not kiss it!*

At length she drew it suddenly away and said, in her natural voice:—

"No, Dr. Strafford! I will not marry. Here or elsewhere, I shall go on writing. Literature shall be my only love — my liege lord. Now, good-night; let me go on attending to my wifely duty toward my chosen helpmeet!"

And once more she dipped her pen in the ink and bent her eyes on that long-pondered page.

"But — first let me look in your eyes and see if you are at peace with the world, and Fate, — and me."

"Not to-night. To-morrow." (She knew that to her large features crying was dreadfully unbecoming.)

"Oh, come, Margaret! Just one glance! Don't

shake your head! Well, then — till to-morrow. Thank Heaven there is a to-morrow for us both, and together! Good-night!”

“Good-night!”

He was gone; she resolutely kept her pen on the paper and moving over it, unthought of — uncared for — until she heard the front door close behind him. Then she pushed back her chair, laid her forehead on the edge of the table, and watched the tears flow; out of her eyes, down her nose, and off its tip; drip, drip, dripping on the floor.

When this ceased to be absurd and amusing, she wiped her eyes and looked over the page of nonsense she had achieved. It was something like her Galena dream! She crumpled it up and threw it into the stove; then she washed her eyes and joined her mother.

“I told him, mother.”

“Oh, Meg! Did you really? Well” — (a sigh) “I’m glad it’s over with. How did he take it? I heard him pacing the floor.”

“Manly as ever. Said he had been preparing himself for years.”

“Did he? Poor fellow!”

“Yes. Said you were always right and he wrong about it.”

“He, wrong?”

“Yes — that it would have been a mistake at any time.”

“A mistake, indeed!”

“Yes. He was very nice about it. Said he

could never be grateful enough to you for refusing him."

"Oh, indeed!"

Anne tossed her head, knitted her brows, patted the floor with her foot, and in every way showed that this was not a pleasant aspect of the case in her eyes — flashing, angry eyes.

"Anything else?"

"Oh, yes, Mother. He spoke in the very kindest and handsomest way of Mr. Prouder."

"Oh, pshaw! As if Mr. Prouder needed his good word!"

"But, Mother" —

"Don't 'but, Mother' me, Margaret, just now, if you please. Has Dr. Strafford no sense at all?"

"Not so much as you have, he seems to think."

"Humph! If he had any sense at all, he would not fall in love and fall out again in one breath. Why does n't he fall in love with you, Margaret!"

"Mother — he" — she stopped; instinctively prevented from betraying an offer; even if made in such an unflattering way as hers had been.

"There, there, my child. Don't say any more about it, but let us go to bed."

To bed they went; where Margaret, at least, slept the sound sleep of youth, at peace with all the world.

Strafford strode homeward in rather a confused state of mind. How had he behaved himself? Like a man — or like a brute? Suddenly he stopped short.

"I'd like to kick myself black and blue! Fool! Brute! Egotist! What must she think of me? To offer to marry a girl because she is unhappy — as if I were offering a fellow admission to a hospital because he had broken his leg!"

Then, as he walked on the ludicrous side presented itself to him: —

"I seem to go through life offering myself to women who won't have me — all of them named McVey!"

Next morning he called at Meg's door, half fearing that she would despise him or laugh at him; but she was bright and good as ever; and when he carefully approached last night's theme she said: —

"Oh, Doctor! I am so glad you asked me to marry you!"

"Why? So that you could set me down hard as I deserved?"

"No — only so that I need never wear the look I have seen on the faces of neglected women approaching old maidenhood; a wistful look that says: 'Oh, dear! No man wants me, after all!' I thank you for taking that burden off my heart!"

"Margaret! There is no man on earth worthy to be your husband!"

"No. I'm afraid not."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"NOW, I'LL NEITHER BORROW NOR LEND."

ZURY's arrangements for removing Phil from Dolly's Circean island have been completed, and must be carried into operation.

"Well, Dolly; how long will it take you to find a couple of other boarders in place of Sam and me?"

"That's the way you put it, is it, Mister Philip McVey, Esquire?"

"Well, it is n't me that fixes it. It's Fate — or Providence, if you like that name better. Providence has provided a splendid opening for Phil McVey. Phil's long and pious devotion to the good of his feller-creeters is about to be recognized and rewarded."

"If Providence knowed Phil McVey as well as I do, mebbe He'd let him alone."

"Sho, now, Dolly! Don't you go back on Providence and say He's making a mistake! And if He is, don't charge it on me. Just look at it — here's me, railroad hand, 'servant of servants, and slave to the Devil,' offered a chance to be my own master, mine-owner, pillar of the State, and ornament to society!"

"Family man, too, I s'pose!"

"Well, not that *I* know of. If you know anything about my prospects in that line, I wish you'd tell me. It'll be news to me."

"Ah, yah! How I hate a liar and a hypocrite!"

"Glad ye do, Dolly; because that leaves me out of being hated, by you, anyway. And I could n't stand *that*!"

"Where ye goin' to live in Galeny?"

"Well—I have hardly made up my mind yet."

"At Preacher Masten's, mebbe."

"Oh, I might—until they came to hate me as you say you do. More than half the time that's the effect of living in other folks' houses, same as it has been here between me and you."

"Oh, Phil! After all that's come and gone! Be you goin' to leave poor old Dolly that-away?" And she burst out crying and rocked back and forth in a passion of sorrow and anger.

Phil thought to himself, "All right! If she'll only take it out so, and not go to pawing me over, I can stand it." Then he said aloud:—

"Leave you? Of course not! We're going to be the best of friends forever. Don't you know what it'll come to? Why, mother and Meg will come up to Galena and live with me, and you'll come over and visit us and stay as long as you like."

"Ah, yah! I hate 'em both! They think I ain't fit to wipe their feet on!"

A terrible blunder on Dolly's part! Not only

did it set vividly before Phil the baseness of his late entanglements ; it also gave him a " practicable grievance " which he hastened to use. He jumped up and said : —

" Well, well ! I'm sorry you don't like my family. I'll bid you good-by, hoping you will change your mind. Now I thought it might take you a month to find the right kind of boarders to take the place of Sam and me. So I brought along a month's board for us both — I can settle with him for his part — and here it is on the table."

" If you dare to leave that money there I'll burn it up ! "

" Oh, no you won't, Dolly ! Good-by, for a while — till you get better humored. Don't burn up the money, please."

And she did not.

As Phil strode down La Salle Street, he mentally hugged himself at the way the interview had passed off. Not even a kiss ! A new leaf turned over — never again a kiss to a woman, unless she be mother, or sister, or —

The past with its falsehood, duplicity, and shame, all gone by and to be forgotten ; the future, the manly, open, honest future, rising unclouded before him.

Once there was a woman who had been, all her life, too mean to buy a wash-tub, and who had always borrowed from her neighbors. At last, one day a peddler came along and offered to take

a dog that she wanted to be rid of, and give her a wash-tub in exchange. So said, so done. Then cried she:—

“Now I've got a wash-tub of my own, 'n' I ain't a-goin' t' neither borrow ner lend!”

The moral of this tale “lays in the application thereof.” Many men indulge in a long course of wrong—crime, dissipation, deception, fraud, or what not—and, when they have drained the cup, throw it out of sight with a gay farewell to the draught *and its consequences*.

A very good plan, if it would only work; but unfortunately the plan of continuing in wrongdoing as long as you choose, and crying “enough” in time to disclaim its consequences, is not a safe scheme in this world.

“Dooz Mis. Dolly Sanders live h'yer?”

“Why—Burr Hobbs! What do ye want o' me?”

“Oh, jest to pass th' time o' day 'n' tell ye haow yer mother gits along—'n' one-thing-another.”

“Wal; step inside 'n' set.”

He transferred a chew of tobacco from his mouth to his pocket and did as he was bid.

“Haow's mother?”

“Oh, she's middlin' peart.”

His eyes, peering covetously around the simple comfort of the room, lighted on a cradle in one corner.

“Why—ye hain't got a baby at last, hev ye?”

"No," said Dolly, with a sigh. "That's my hired woman's. She jes' set it in h'yer t' be aout of her way."

Hobbs went over to the cradle. The dark, bad face of the unjust, violent man brooded long and silently over the rosy innocent slumbering on its pillow. His fingers touched the silken curls, and the child stirred uneasily as if pained by the contact.

Dolly's voice showed a little softening as she asked him: —

"Haow d' yew come along?"

"Oh — bad enough. Goin' t' move t' Ioway soon 's I kin sell my place."

"What's th' matter?"

"Wal — I s'pose ye heer tell of th' lawsuit."

"Never heered a word of it."

He told her about the killing of his ox, of the jury's giving him a verdict against the railroad, of the appeal to the Supreme Court, of his mortgaging his farm to employ counsel, and of his final defeat.

"An, I heered that it wuz a pertickler friend o' yourn th't killed th' critter in th' fust place."

"Who's that?"

"Wal — same feller as did me a bad turn once, daown t' Danfield. Helped run the railroad line cater-cornerin' threw my medder; 'n' fooled my dog I set on th' party."

"Who was it?" (Her heightening color showed that the question was unnecessary.)

"Feller named McVey. Don't ye know him?"

"Oh, yes. He boarded here a spell."

"Did n't never name the killin' o' my critter?"

"No!"

"I s'pose a leetle thing like killin' my critter 'n' drivin' me t' rack 'n' ruin did n't make no 'mpression on *him* t' make him mention th' triflin' fact!"

"Oh — it warn't his fault."

"Warn't, hay? Was it mine?"

"It warn't no consarn o' his'n whether the railroad paid ye fer yer critter or not."

"Oh, I expected ye t' take his side! No consarn, o' his'n! Wal — he better make it his consarn if he knows when he's well off! If he don't I will!"

"What 'll ye dew?"

"Never ye mind!"

"Want him t' pay ye fer th' critter, 'n' fer yer lawsuit, 'n' everything else ye ever lost?"

"Naw, I don't, 'n' yew know it! Ef he 'll pay me fer th' critter, I kin git squar with th' road fer th' rest!" A horrible look darted from under his black brows with these words.

"How much wuz th' critter wuth?"

"Thirty-six dollars th' jury vally'd it at."

Strange fatality! The very sum Phil had that morning paid her over and above all he really owed her! And that she meant to return to him!

"Oh, he 'll pay you that."

"Ya-as! When the devil's dead 'n' hell freezes over!"

"You want t' keep a civil tongue in yer head, a-talkin' t' me!"

"I did n't go fer t' talk bad t' yew. Everythin' 's ag'in me so — I ferget."

Dolly rose and went to her room, to the bureau where she had laid the money ready to return to Phil. Bless you, Dolly! You're going to give it to his enemy!

She takes it up. Oh, Dolly, don't hesitate! Don't change your mind!

"Now, if I give it to Hobbs, Phil will know whether I really care fer him or not."

Yes, yes, dear Dolly! carry it to him quick!

"But then — that 'll be the end of it. It 'll go in at one ear 'n' out of the other."

No it won't, Dolly! Phil has a grateful soul — he 'll never forget your care for him now when he is far away, out of sight and hearing, rumbling along through the darkness on his way to Galena!

"I better git all I can out o' Burr, 'n' then give it all up t' Phil — 'n' give him th' money t' square up with Burr, fust chance he gits."

Dolly! Dolly!! Life and death are in your hands! All your faults shall be forgiven you if you will do as you started to do! Don't lay down those rags and leave them!

Vain! She has gone back empty-handed.

As soon as Hobbs had departed, Dolly hunted for her pen, her ink, her paper, and wrote a note to Phil.

"I want to see you *right away*, on business.

D. S."

And next day she carried the note herself to the round-house where the Pioneer had to go to be turned and prepared for her return trip. There it lay neglected, day after day, on the dirty, cluttered desk of the master-mechanic, until it acquired the hue of its surroundings and passed from mortal ken.

After waiting a few days, she said to her husband, Conductor Jim : —

"What day will Phil be on your run?"

"Oh — lessee — day after to-morrer."

"Well, I want t' see him. You tell him, Jim. Tell him I want t' see him *bad*."

"Oh, Phil he's took up with Galeny now. *He* don't care fer us no more — can't touch him with a ten-foot pole!"

"Can't, hey? Well, if he knows what's wholesome fer him he'll show up h'yer mighty quick! 'N' I want you t' tell him so fer me!"

"O. K."

Then when the proper time had elapsed she attacked Jim again : —

"D' ye see Phil?"

"Ya-as — I seen him."

"Give him my message?"

"'Course I did!" replied the false-hearted Jim, who had forgotten all about it, and never imagined it to be of the slightest consequence.

"Wha' d' he say?"

"Said he'd call over, fust chance he c'd any way find er make."

“Well! I’m glad to hear it! He’d better!”

A week or so later she wrote again:—

“MR. PHILLIP McVEY,— If you will believe me for once that I am not lieing, I tell you that I have some very important business to tell you and if you know when you are well of you will come and see your true friend, D. SANDERS.”

This she gave Sam Sanders and it reached Phil. On reading it he said to himself:—

“Well, Dolly— I know when I’m well off, I guess— and it’s when I *don’t* come and see you.”

So when he decided to leave the note unanswered, he thought the decision one in keeping with his new, manly resolution; whereas it was, in fact, a piece of the utmost ill-manners, and of unspeakably cruel ill-luck.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HAPPY DAYS, MAKE THE MOST OF THEM.

PERRY FENTON was scarcely the man to drop without good reason anything he had set his heart on. Of course if he let Annie alone he should lose her — and deserve to lose her. But then, suppose he were to pursue her, lose his heart and his peace of mind — he felt that both would be in her power as soon as he made a serious effort to win her love — and she should prefer a man of her own age after all! No doubt it would go hard with him. For the elder to be cut out by the younger is dreadful. For the younger to be ousted by the elder — but then, alas, they so seldom are!

While making up his mind, he would see Phil McVey. This might put all his hopes at rest — or all his fears. So behold him at the Sanders' door.

"Mr. Fenton! Well, you *are* a stranger! I've be'n half-a-mind to come and see you. But then you know — you young men living all alone so — we women must take care of ourselves, even if we *be* old married ladies, like me."

"Oh, I assure you, Mrs. Sanders, nothing has kept me away but everlasting overwork. I have

been meaning to call ever since I saw you last. By the way, how was Miss Masten when you heard from her?"

"Oh — same old two-and-sixpence, I guess."

"Not engaged yet? I fancied perhaps she and Mr. McVey — being such old friends" —

"They ain't old friends; and they'll never marry one another! You mark my words!" and she nodded in a mysterious way that forced Perry to think that Annie had made Dolly her confidante, and that the matter was settled adversely to Phil's supposed wishes.

"Well, indeed! I'm sorry for Phil! Is he not at home this evening?"

"Oh, he spends all his spare time to Galeny, now — jest runs into Chicago and out again. Gittin' ready t' start a-lead-minin', come spring."

"Where does he board in Galena — in case I should be there some day?"

"Oh, at Preacher Masten's. But *then*, that's as likely t' break a match as t' make one; livin' in th' same haouse so."

"Goes about with Miss Masten, much?"

"Everlastin'ly, I hear. But *then*, — Annie's pretty enough t' do better 'n marry Philip McVey, Esquire! An' she'll do it, too; you mark my words!"

So it was not long before Perry found it absolutely necessary to take a trip to Galena. He wanted to address the temperance society whereof Phil was an officer and most active member. He wanted to talk with Mr. Masten about the pro-

posed Wabash Avenue Church — and with other people about — other things.

He and Phil had a glorious ride on the Pioneer; each always growing in the other's esteem, however widely they differed. At last Phil pointed out "the Red Hill on the off side" as they entered Galena, where was to be the lead-mine. Fenton did not know who Phil's backer was, not having heard of Prouder in connection with the enterprise; and he was watching for a chance to offer help in the way of money, when he could do so conveniently; but the chance was not yet.

The announcement that the admired Perry Fenton was to speak on temperance brought together a good audience. It was like the other temperance meetings with which our good, virtuous country-towns are familiar, interesting, musical, joyful, witty, wise, and philanthropic. They are glimpses of the best and brightest part of our national life — that part which will tend to prolong it in peace, freedom, virtue, and prosperity for a thousand years, or any greater number, for all we can see to the contrary.

Phil loyally gave up to the guest his own accustomed privilege of escorting Annie home. He had a little compensation for his self-sacrifice when he saw, out of the corner of his eye, that she kept herself artfully disengaged from the waiting Fenton, until Phil had actually given his arm to her mother and started on ahead.

"Well, Miss Masten; how did you like the meeting?"

"It was delightful! I thought your speech the best thing I ever heard in my life! My! what would I give to be a man, and say and do such things at such times and places!"

"I'm only glad you're not a man!"

"Well," she answered hurriedly, "that's where you and I differ."

"I think it's the only difference we ever had. I wonder if we shall ever have another?"

"Mercy! I hope so. That would be a sign that our acquaintance would be very short — or very dull."

"Should you be sorry?"

"'Deed I should! I calculate on keeping all my friends forever."

"*I calculate on our being more than friends.*" (He felt her little hand on his arm grow suddenly lighter.) "Neighbors, perhaps."

"Oh! Well, stranger things have happened."

"I'm working up the Wabash Avenue Church scheme all I know how. I must have a serious talk with your father to-morrow — about several things."

"Dear father! If you can relieve his mind from the dreadful fear of finding it to be his duty to take charge of a parish at 'Milksick, Hooppole Township, Lowdown County,' or some such place."

"Chicago, in Cook County, will suit him better — and you too, I hope."

She made no reply.

"Of course, he's not the only person to be considered."

"No. The advancement of Christ's Kingdom is before all."

"Yes, that first. But then there are other earthly people to be thought of."

"Yes. Sinners to be saved."

"And the minister's family need not be lost sight of, entirely."

"No. Mother especially must be cared for."

"And how about mother's eldest daughter?"

"Who, me?" (This with a shallow pretense of the most artless surprise.) "Oh, don't consider me at all."

"I can't well help doing so."

"Do you want to do me a great favor?" (The starry eyes looked up to his appealingly.)

"The greatest favor I can ever do any woman."

"Well, then, it is this. Leave me utterly out of the question in *all* your calculations."

"Miss Masten — Annie, if I may call you so — do you mean it for earnest?"

A very great number of very little nods replied.

"If your happiness is to be otherwise cared for" —

"Oh, no-no-no-no! Only myself! Nobody else — ever!"

Silently they reached the parsonage gate and joined the others. Annie, thinking that she had now settled, satisfactorily and finally, all the mundane affairs with which she had anything personally to do, was quite gay, and laughingly told Fenton (in Phil's hearing) not to repeat to Phil any of the disparaging remarks she had been

making about him, because she did not want to hurt his feelings even if he *was* a little vain! And all bade each other good-night in great good humor.

Neither of the men talked much as they walked away. Phil's heart was a little full and heavy under the deprivation of Annie's company; while Fenton's was still more depressed by the result of his enjoyment of it. This was all, was it? He, who had thought himself rather an attractive man — still young, though his hair was getting a little thin in front — utterly snubbed by a country beauty whom he had done his best to please, with every advantage on his side!

It did not take Annie long to con over for the hundredth time the lesson she had taught herself.

"When *Phil* wants me to marry him — if he ever does — I shall tell him that no man not a Christian can be trusted with a woman's happiness; and that I've decided to stay single all my life! But, oh dear! How I shall go on loving him *as a friend*, and praying for his conversion!"

A few tears mingled with her prayer as usual; but afterward a little smile followed as she remembered how nicely she had headed off Mr. Fenton! With the smile still nestling in her lips, as loth to leave them, she fell asleep.

A grand walking party was on the tapis for the morrow — all the way to the Red Hill and over it, if the weather proved propitious. It did, and they set off as soon as the dew would permit.

Mr. and Mrs. Masten, and Annie and Mr. Fenton, were to meet Phil, and his new partner, and Sam Sanders, on the ground. On the way, Mrs. Masten pointed out to Mr. Fenton the hide and leather store of J. R. Grant & Co.

"There is a sword beaten into a plowshare and a spear into a pruning-hook. One of the 'Co.' is Ulysses Grant — he was educated at West Point, and fought in the Mexican War. Now, you see, he has resigned out of the army, and gone to work like the sincere and humble Christian I hope he is."

"What kind of a fellow is he?"

"Oh, wonderfully quiet. He always seems to me to be thinking about the fellow-men he has slain without knowing whether they'd been saved or not! I don't see how soldiers can do so. I should always want to ask any — any gentleman I was going to kill, if he'd experienced religion! But, of course, it would be impossible to do so."

"I think it would interfere somewhat with military operations."

"Yes; and I should n't be surprised, if the truth was known, if that was the reason Captain Grant left the army! He couldn't bear to see souls hurried to their account, and may be some of them not yet subjects of Saving Grace!"

"More likely because he could n't live on his pay. Saving money is a more present thought than Saving Grace."

"Well; I believe the pay *is* small. But then, ought a man to be paid much for killing his fellow-men *unprepared?*"

"They'd have to offer me a good deal to make me willing to do it."

"Yes, I should hope so! Now, if Government would hire armies of missionaries to save souls instead of destroy them — arm them with Bibles and orthodox tracts pointing out the way of salvation!"

"Ah, if only you women had the making of war, things would be different!"

"I should hope and pray they would!"

"Before every battle you would have missionaries sent into the enemy's army to prepare them for death."

"Yes, indeed! That would be Christ's way!"

"Then mark them as fast as they were saved; and in battle, order that all not marked must be taken prisoners till they could be converted."

"I — suppose so. But I believe you are laughing at me!"

"Oh, no. I was only thinking that the cheapest way would be to abolish war at the start."

"Yes," shortly replied the good woman, afraid she had been laughed at; which fear haunted her all day. "I don't care," she said to herself. "What is earthly conquest compared to one soul in eternal fire?" But she did care — and never told her husband of the conversation.

When Zury and the two women happened to be strolling together, he said: —

"I've been thinking we'd better call this red hill Mount Annie Masten."

"Better call it 'Mount Anne McVey,' inno-

cently rejoined Mrs. Masten, thinking loyally of her absent friend.

"Ho-ho! Maybe you're right! It might come to that!"

And he had a good laugh, while Annie's cheeks, so far as he could observe them under the broad brim of her hat, took on a tint in very good keeping with the color of the hill.

Annie did not find it easy to get speech with Phil that day. And yet she had something to say.

"Phil! oh, Phil! Where do you keep yourself all the time? Seems a little as if there weren't any Phil any more! Come here and talk to me this minute, or I'll go home! So *there* now!"

"Certainly, Annie. But do you expect a man to do his own barking when he's upped and borrowed a dog? What do you think I brought Perry Fenton out here for, if not to keep you pacified so I could attend to my little biz?"

"Well, I'm getting luxurious and want two dogs to bark to me! So just come right here while I tell you something."

"All right! Tell away; I'll listen. That's what I'm for."

"Well; mother and I are going to Chicago with Mr. Fenton to visit Dolly. Now are n't you sorry you've moved to Galena? Chicago's to be the fashionable city for the Mastens for a while! Say; are n't you sorry? Are you tongue-tied, or gone to sleep?"

Phil gazed at her with an expression of blank dismay, as he thought of wicked and unscrupulous Dolly. At first, Annie fancied he was acting a part; putting on an exaggerated despair in view of their temporary separation. Then she saw that he was really troubled, and a sympathetic wave of alarm flashed like lightning over her lovely features.

"Oh, don't look so! What is it?"

"How long since this plan was formed!"

"I think it was only yesterday mother wrote to say we should be there. Why? Is there any quarrel between you and Dolly Sanders?"

"Oh, no, not the slightest. I wish you were not going!"

"Oh, why did n't I know? We can cut it short. I'll get mother to restrict it to one day. I suppose if you wanted me to know what the matter is, you'd tell me."

"Perhaps I'll tell you some day — perhaps never — perhaps I'll never have a chance."

He smiled at her sadly; a kind of farewell smile, and walked dejectedly away, while she followed him with her yearning eyes. The sunshine had gone from the sky for both of them, for how could one be gay while the other was unhappy?

"Oh, dear," said Annie to herself, "I wish I could think that our going back in company with Mr. Fenton had anything to do with it. I would break through everything to set that right."

The party was spoiled by the evident distress

of Phil and Annie, and they soon separated ; no one knowing whence came the shadow of the cloud.

As they walked home from Mr. Masten's prayer-meeting that night, Annie managed to give Phil's hand a little detaining clutch as he passed her, and they paused under the lilac-bush while the rest went in.

" Phil — tell me, Phil — has my — our going to town in company with Mr. Fenton anything to do with your — change of feelings? Because " (she added hurriedly) " if it has, I am determined it shall not ! There is nothing I could not truly say to set your mind at rest on that score ! You might frame the speech yourself, and I would say it all after you, — from my heart ! "

" Annie — my angel — there is only one thing I ask you to think and to believe ; that you are my love — my only love — past, present, and always ! "

She lifted her face and their lips met in a kiss — their first. Then he was gone and she went in ; but stopped in dismay on the porch —

" Why ! Where was the speech I was to make about his not being a Christian ! "

She had quite forgotten to make her little speech ! And she blushed so at her forgetfulness that her mother observed the changed color, but silently. And even after her prayers and her down-lying, the hand on which her cheek rested could feel it blushing yet — at her forgetfulness !

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A CLOUD — FUNNEL-SHAPED !

PERRY FENTON took Mrs. Masten and her daughter to Chicago on Tuesday night, so that they could spend Wednesday in the city, and come back by Phil's train on Thursday morning. They were to spend the day at Dolly's and the 'night at the hotel.

Dolly received them graciously and entertained them gorgeously.

"Well, well! It did seem as though I was n't ever goin' to see none of my Galena friends again! And there's Mr. McVey goin' to leave us for Galena! Times have changed since Chicago drew everythin' away from Galena — now everythin' 's driftin' back!"

When Dolly could get Annie to herself, she began her campaign at once.

"Good chance to get your weddin' things now you 're down here!"

"*My* wedding things? They'd be blue-moulded and moth-eaten before they could be put to use!"

"Oh, lauk! Don't tell me! All this Galena business don't mean anythin', of course! Oh, not at all!"

"No, I won't tell you if you don't want to hear

the truth. But if you do, I'll tell you that there's just as much prospect of my having a wedding, as there is of *your* having a wedding! So there now!"

"Sakes alive! And when you do marry, which of 'em will it be?"

"Which of whom?"

"Oh, don't put on any airs with your old neighbor! Which — McVey or Fenton?"

"Neither of them! Neither of them ever asked me; and if they both came this minute and kneeled there on the rug side by side, saying, 'be mine, be mine,' I'd say, 'No,' to both!"

"Well! of all the creeters, you're one of 'em! Such a man as Perry Fenton, too!"

"Why Perry Fenton any more than Phil McVey?"

"Oh, Phil's all very well for his station in life — but Mister Perry Fenton!"

Annie's color was rather a tell-tale traitor at this rude thrust, but she managed to hold her tongue. Dolly went on: —

"Phil's kept away from us since he went to Galeny, as though we had the small-pox! I had some business to settle with him, and I've wrote him and wrote him, 'n' sent word to him; but, no, sir! He jest *won't* come!"

"Well, well!" said Annie — outwardly condemnatory, but inwardly well pleased.

"I wish you'd tell him that a man, a man he knows, but no friend of his, has said something to me that concerns him, and I ought to tell him right off."

"I'll tell him — but if he won't mind what you say" —

"Oh, he'll come if *you* say so!"

If Annie had been Dolly's only visitor — if Annie's simple-hearted mother had not been within reach, Dolly's malicious curiosity might have been foiled, and all might have been well; but, alas! Mrs. Masten was Dolly's next prey, and easy prey. It took not a quarter of an hour to elicit from her all her thoughts, wishes, hopes, fears, and the grounds for each. Even down to Fenton's starting from the meeting-house gay and hopeful, and arriving at the parsonage quite cut up; and Phil's exhibiting signs of just the opposite feelings. All came out, and all was jotted down in Dolly's book of doom.

Part of the spree was to consist of Perry Fenton's drinking tea with them, and later taking to prayer-meeting all who cared to go. Dolly could not leave her house alone, and asked if Annie would not like to stay and chat with her; and she watched Annie's expression narrowly as she awaited her reply. Annie jumped at the chance — and her fate was sealed!

"Glad *not* to go with Perry Fenton, are ye? And all the gladder because he's crazy to have ye go!"

At tea, Perry fairly outdid himself in his exertions to please and amuse them all. Irish, German, negro, anything and everything that came into his head — he kept everybody on the *qui vive*, until he found out, at the last minute, that

Annie was not going; only Mrs. Masten and Jim Sanders! His jaw fell in spite of himself. Annie almost pitied him, but comforted herself with the thought that to discourage him was a kind cruelty, while the opposite would be a cruel kindness. Dolly pitied him in a different and far more effectual way; one which might tend to afford him a remedy for his tribulation.

Prayer-meeting was much as usual; but it seemed to poor Annie as if it would never come to an end. When her mother called for her, she found her just inside the front door ready to go to the hotel; wraps all on and satchel in hand.

"Oh, mother!" she said, in an agonized whisper. "Where *have* you been? I thought you would *never* come! Yes; Dolly's gone to bed; let's go at once. Good-night, Mr. Sanders. Good-night, Mr. Fenton—oh, you're going with us, are you?"

Then she took her mother's arm and hurried her away; not saying a word during the walk.

Mr. Fenton tried to keep up a little talk with Mrs. Masten, but it was up-hill work; so, perceiving that there was some catastrophe in the wind, about which he knew nothing, he simply "talked against time," to give them a good chance to be silent.

"Some awful quarrel between Annie and Dolly," thought Mrs. Masten. "I know Annie can't be in fault. But what can it be about?"

When they got to their room she saw Annie's eyes for the first time.

"Why, my *child*! Come to your own mother and tell her all about it!"

She sat down and took the unwilling girl into her arms.

"Oh, mother — I don't believe I can tell you!"

After a while, when she grew calmer, she asked, hesitating, and shamefaced: —

"Mother, do married women ever — are they ever in love with other men, and going on living with their husbands?"

"I've heard of such things, my dear." Then there was a short silence; after which she added: "Such a woman would be bad enough for anything. I would n't believe a word she said."

"Would n't you?" asked Annie, brightening up a little. But her relief was of short duration.

"No, love; not unless there was some other proof beside her word."

"But there is!" said the unhappy girl, remembering the belt-ribbon, and many other unmistakable indications of Phil's faithlessness and duplicity.

"Can a man be in love with two women at once — or with a married woman at all, when he is n't married to her?"

"No, dear. No Christian could ever think of such a thing! But he might be very kind and friendly to her."

"And make her presents?"

"Ye-es — if there's no secrecy or underhand business about it."

"Well — he could n't give her things his *real* love had given him, now could he?"

"Now, Annie; his *real* love, as you call her, if she heard such things about him should give him a chance to explain things — should ask him."

"But suppose he had never given her any excuse to talk to him about it."

"Then she must wait till he does."

Poor Annie went to bed, and lay very still, with her face to the wall, so as not to disturb her mother; but the dead wall was visible to her tired eyes by morning light, before she closed them in blessed unconsciousness. When, with a start, she woke again to her pain, her mother was up and dressed.

"Annie, love; I'm going down to breakfast now. I'll bring you up something to eat, and then it will be time to go to the train."

At breakfast, Phil saw Mrs. Masten. He knew from her expression and from Annie's absence that all was over — that the sky had fallen down upon him and the earth opened at his feet. How much truth and how much falsehood had probably been made use of? It did not make much difference. The lie could not be materially worse than the truth. His intentions had been bad as bad could be. "Whoso looketh on a woman," etc.

Dolly's coarse mind and bad heart did not know fully what she was doing — where she was putting herself or anybody else; so she was not impelled to lie, except perhaps in the way of exag-

gerating Phil's attack and her defense. If she did at all forecast the effect of her confidential communication to her old friend, she probably merely anticipated a jealous rage on Annie's part, a little like her own, a sudden breaking off of the engagement, and an acceptance of Perry Fenton ; then at least revenge and relief for herself, and, who knew ? perhaps a chance once more to weave her spell about her old lover, whom other women seemed to be so wild to get away from her ! (She had never prized him so highly as when she saw that Annie preferred him to the great Perry Fenton.)

Phil, leaning from the window of his engine-cab, before starting, saw Mrs. Masten enter the rear car of his train accompanied by a slender and closely veiled figure which he knew well in spite its being so hidden. What a gulf separated to-day from yesterday — him from Annie Masten ! Yesterday, he could have been at her side, could have smiled back her smiles, listened to her low, sweet tones, and joined in her innocent gayety. To-day —

The poor boy did not even know whether he was at liberty to speak to the mother. In what shape the blow had fallen he had no means of finding out. Should he ever know in all his life ? Or was it a mystery he must go to his grave without solving ?

One other question struck him like a blow in the mouth. Suppose there should be a parley, and it should appear that Dolly had falsified

every fact regarding their relations; could he contradict her? No! Let her make her story as she might, he would never open his lips. He was no mean old Adam, to say, "The woman tempted me and I did eat."

He once sent Sam back to see if anything could be done for the ladies' comfort, but Sam brought no very enlightening or comforting account.

"Mis. Masten, she looks all right; but Annie, she might jes' 's well be dead — 'n' better."

"How did she look?"

"Wal; 's though she did n't weigh a pound; exceptin' her eyelids. When I come in she started suddent; jes' like I was a murderer come fer her go-ar. 'N' when she seed 't was only me, she jes' shet to her big eyelids agin, 'n' did n't say aye, yes, ner no."

"Her mother say anything?"

"Jes' 'llowed no thankye; 'n' how Annie had n't slep' none las' night 'n' she wanted her t' make it up all she could. You 'n' Annie hain't had no words, hev ye?"

"No."

The sun climbed the vast concave of the prairie sky behind him, and glided slowly down the western slope in front. The shadow of the Pioneer's smoke-stack stretched far ahead at starting; then for hours hopped, and skipped, and raced along the fences at his right; and at last lay quiet along the boiler. Shadows of clouds spread their flat blotches here and there on the grassy plain. Long lines of wild ducks, and

wedge-shaped families of wild geese sped high in air on their way to the arctic regions.

A certain foolish dog came out as usual from a certain distant farm-house whence he always sallied forth; and described his customary curve in his always fruitless effort to reach the track in time to bark at the train. The usual little boys returning from school, swinging the same battered straw hats, stood on the same road-crossing (the old ox-killing spot), each boy trying to be the last to get out of the way; while the same little girls, in the same faded sun-bonnets, looked on in the same speechless anguish of fear lest the boys should get run over at last.

So dragged on the heavy day, Phil doing his task like a man in a bad dream. Once he pushed up his eyelids with his thumb and finger to see if he was awake. It was no dream.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WRECK.

LATE in the afternoon they stopped for wood at a small station not far beyond the old ox-killing crossing. They took on as much as possible, piling it high above the top of the tender.

"Look out for the track-repairers jest this side of the curve, Phil," said the telegrapher, as the train pulled out. "I guess they 'll have got through and run the push car in on to the next siding afore you git thar; if they have n't they 'll have a flag out."

As Phil neared the curve he saw the freshly moved dirt where they had been at work, and also observed the flag-man, evidently relieved from duty, walking on with his flag rolled up under his arm. This freed Phil from any anxiety as to the state of the road, although he thought he noticed that the fellow was unsteady in his gait, as he passed him.

He rounded the curve at full speed, and saw the distant station, the switch-target set up all right for the main track.

What else did he see?

He saw, and took in at a glance, that the push-car, loaded with many bars of railroad iron, had

run off the track between him and the station. Also that the laborers, insane or drunk, were trying to replace the car instead of running back to warn him to stop !

Still there was some chance to modify the disaster, — if he whistled for brakes — he had done it already ; if he reversed his engine — he had done that too ; and started the sand to running on the rail — he had opened the sand-valve ; — there was a bare chance to avert, not wreck, but utter ruin.

“ Brake ! ” shrieked the whistle. “ Brake ! ” it wailed again ; and again “ Brake ! ” — “ Brake ! ” — “ Brake ! ” And “ Brake ! ” the echoing woods replied in despairing chorus.

Sam sprang to his wheel and began his tightening. Then Phil, finding that she was not holding back as she ought, stepped to the side and looked down. The sand was not running !

“ Jump, Sam ! Never mind the brake ! Jump, I say ! ”

Sam gave one glance to where Phil stood hanging out of his door, and thought he was looking for a favorable place to jump. Then he leaped and looked back — there was Phil back at his lever, rattling the handle of the sand-valve ! Sam grasped blindly at the passing cars to try to get back to his post ; but then came an awful crash of breaking wood, iron, and glass, and the four cars spliced themselves into each other as one long mass and pushed forward a few yards while the engine surged over on its side, and then all

was still except a wild rush of escaping steam about the prostrate Pioneer.

Sam flew to the front, climbed over the wrecked push-car with its tangle of rails scattered like gigantic jack-straws, and screamed "Phil! Phil!! Phil!!!!" in wild despair. The engine's wheels, playing backward like lightning, were toward him as she lay, and he rushed around her front still screaming "Phil! Phil! Phil! Phil!" Then he dashed through the few scared laborers and threw himself like a madman on the pile of fire-wood that covered the foot-board where his beloved chief had stood so often and so long, and where he saw him last.

The sticks as they plunged forward had broken off the safety-valve hangers, so the valve had blown clear out and nearly freed the boiler from pressure, in a few seconds; still, the whole place was one undistinguishable mass of steam and hot water, and wood and fragments of the cab.

Fast and furious flew the sticks behind him as he dug and burrowed in the hot and horrible mess. Sometimes he was entirely invisible — sometimes his feet might be seen protruding from the place as he groveled to find Phil. His worn and shapeless working-shoes sticking out of the dreadful ruck attracted the attention of some on-looker who seized them to drag him out, but he kicked him away with a shout of "Lemme be!" and a curse.

In perhaps two minutes, which seemed an hour, his voice was heard again.

“Now, pull me out.”

And they dragged with all their might — one man at first — then one at each foot, then as many as could get hold of him — and slowly, slowly, he was brought into view.

But what is that thing he has fastened himself to with a grip like the clasp of death? A long, heavy, limp bundle of steaming rags — all there is left of the young Samson, Phil McVey!

Both seemed dead. So tightly was one clasped by the other that they had to be forced apart, being too heavy to be carried together. They were taken into the barn-like freight-room of the little station and laid side by side on the floor until cots could be brought, when they were separated and one stretched on each.

Sam, though dreadfully scalded about the hands and face, soon recovered from his swoon, and raising himself with difficulty tottered over to Phil's side. He thrust his hand within his jacket and cried: —

“His heart's a-beatin'! Why don't ye git a doctor, ye Hell-hounds! What ye monkeyin' raound h'yer fer, ye ** ** **! I'd like t' kill every ** ** ** of ye!” And he started for the door, even in his maimed condition, but was prevented from going out by the others, who told him the doctor was at the passenger-cars, but would be up in a minute; at the same time sending one of their number to hasten his coming.

Then Sam went back and blew in Phil's mouth, and raised his arms and pressed his chest alter-

nately, to try to restore respiration. At last something that sounded like a sob rewarded his efforts, and the breath seemed to flutter a little of itself.

When the doctor came, after a delay that seemed an age, Sam explained to him : —

“ I got his head free 'most as soon as I teched him ; 'n' all the rest of the time I wuz a-throwin' the wood offen his legs.”

The doctor examined Phil carefully, pushed up his eyelids, and observed the pupils.

“ He 'll likely come to ! ”

“ Glory hallelujah, Doctor ! Say that agin ! ”

“ He 'll likely come to — but I 'd a leetle druther he would n't.”

“ Wha — at ? ” asked poor Sam, in a faint quaver.

“ Can't live.”

The crushed friend went and sat down in his own place and groaned aloud. Then he went back to where the doctor was at work over Phil.

“ I don't believe it ! It 's a cursed lie ! Phil can't die ! Can't live ? I say he can't die ! If there 's a God in Heaven, Phil McVey can't die like this ! ”

“ Too much cuticle destroyed,” said the doctor. And he went on clipping and removing the soaked fabrics, the skin coming with the clothes, in pale, shriveled patches.

“ Bring me some linen — or if the linen and lint 's all used up, bring me some of that cotton-batting. I can't save him, but I can let him die easy.”

The fresh air on his burns woke Phil up to consciousness.

"What's all this, boys? Oh, I remember! Well, I feel pretty comfortable. Doctor, are you doing anything to me? I can't feel you. I don't feel any pain."

"Sorry for it, my poor boy."

This was Phil's first intimation that all was not well with him. When the stripping operation was carried far enough, he said:—

"Lemme see, Doctor."

They raised his head, and he gave one glance down his trunk, which looked like one of those anatomical colored drawings of the flayed body of a man; and he said, with a sigh:—

"Oh—it's no use!"

Then they put the fluffy cotton all over him, wet with some cold oil, and drew the sheet up to his poor blistered chin, and laid small pieces of the cotton on such parts of his face as could be covered without impeding his breathing.

"Now, for you, my man," said the doctor to Sam.

"Me! I did n't know as I was hurt. Oh, yes!" (Looking at his dreadful hands, and feeling his thickened and distorted nose and lips, and blistered throat.) "But that ain't noth'n'. You jes' 'tend t' him."

"Lay down, boy, and lemme take a little care of you."

"Yes, do, Sam," mumbled Phil, "I sh'll want you to care for mother and Meg."

So the doctor dressed Sam's injuries, while the salt tears ran down his cheeks and soaked the wounds underneath the doctor's applications. As soon as he was free, he staggered to his feet again and went to Phil, who had seemed to be wanting him, and calling him with his piteous eyes.

"How did you get hurt, Sam? I saw you jump."

"Wal — the' wuz a leetle wood a-layin' on yer legs; 'n' I jest — laid it off like."

Then two raw and blistered hands met in a moment's pressure. Phil could see the whole scene after the wreck and all his friend's self-sacrifice.

"I would n't 'a' jumped, Phil; only I seed ye a-hangin' aout, 'n' I thort ye wuz a-jumpin'."

Phil only shook his head, and said: —

"The sand would n't run!"

"Ye 'd orter jumped, Phil! Oh, I wish 't ye 'd 'a' jumped, Phil!"

"And seen my whole train in the ditch? And maybe burnt up, passengers and all? No, Sam. It's better as it is. It's better as it is."

Next, thinking of his lost lady-love, he whispered: —

"Is she hurt, Sam?"

"Not a mite! Smoke-stack and headlight off — safety-valve blowed out, 'n' one gauge cock broke off. That's what let the water out on you. A derrick 'll set her on her legs agin, to-morrer."

"Oh, the Pioneer," said Phil, and the ghost of a wan smile almost made its appearance on the changed face.

"Doctor; was — were there any of the passengers hurt?"

"A woman had her arm broke — middle-aged woman with a young woman daughter."

"Daughter all right?"

"Yes — she's tendin' tew her mother at the section-house. S'pose ye heered about the conductor?"

"Jim Sanders? No! what?"

"He was a-settin' brakes when you struck — 'n' he never knowed what hurt him. Thar he lays in the corner." And he pointed to a shapeless mass — poor Jim Sanders's body, covered with some empty grain-bags and staining the rough boards of the floor with a long, dark-red streak that perhaps shows there to this day.

A deep groan burst from Phil at this news. He thought of gay, good-natured, simple-hearted, conductor Jim, and tears of pity and regret — and remorse — forced themselves from the corners of his eyes.

Soon after nightfall arrived the relief-train from Galena, with Zury Prouder on board. Zury did not know the height, breadth, and depth of the monstrous loss which had befallen him until he burst into the freight-room, and sank on his trembling knees at Phil's side. They had told him that the engineer was killed — afterward that he was only hurt — but he did not ascertain the truth until he reached the spot.

His Bible furnished the only words he could think of; the only words he needed: —

““ Oh, my son Absalom; would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son ! ” ”

When the Galena doctors came in to hold a consultation, he met them at the door, and whispered that if a hundred dollars apiece, or a thousand for that matter, would make any difference to Phil, they could have it. Then he stepped out, and agonized and wrestled with his agony until they had finished. When they came out, he saw all they had to say; it was scarcely necessary for them even to shake their heads to let him know that there was no hope. Then he called up his manhood, and entered the chamber of death with a smile.

“ Phil, my boy; we shall all be together before long, where pain and sorrow and parting are no more.”

“ I hope so, Uncle Zury,” mumbled the other.

Later the relief-train was ready to run back to Galena with the dead and such of the living as could be moved without harm. Phil was neither; but Sam was to go, and the doctors came in to move him.

“ No. I ’ll stay with Phil ! ”

“ Better go in, my boy. We can’t half care for you here, nor ’tend to you right. Phil won’t need ye.”

“ I don’t care for that; and I don’t go, what’s more.”

They silently nodded to each other and stepped up to the cot, one at each corner. But before they could lift it, Sam slipped off one side, stag-

gered to his feet, and seizing a spike-maul which lay there, he raised it in his bandaged hands, and said, with a curse : —

“ I ’ll kill the man that lays a hand on me ! You hear me ? ”

Old Prouder here interfered, and said : —

“ Gentlemen, ye mean well, but ye ’re makin’ a mistake. This h’yer young man ’n’ me, we ain’t a-goin’ on this train ; ’n’ we’re free men, ’n’ ye can’t take us without a warrant.”

So they desisted, and Sam rolled heavily on his cot once more, and let the doctors replace his disordered bandages. Then they all departed, lugging off Jim Sanders’s remains, and leaving only the original country practitioner in charge. Soon the sound of the departing train was heard through the evening dews and damps ; and then all was still and lonely — no one in the room but the doctor, Zury, Sam, and Phil — and Death.

Phil wanted to ask the doctor whether any of the passengers inquired for him before they all went away on the train ; but while trying to bring his failing faculties to bear to do so, he fell into a lethargy, during which the doctor went elsewhere. In a half-hour or so, Phil awoke from his stupor with a start, and an agonized cry : —

“ Mother ! *Mother* ! MOTHER ! How sorry you ’ll be ! Who ’ll take care of you and Meg ? Alone in the world ! Alone and poor ! Poor ! ”

“ Philip, my boy ; is ole Zury Prouder poor ? ’Cause if he ain’t, they ain’t. What’s his’n, is theirs.”

"I know what you mean, Uncle Zury, but it won't do."

"Philip, I asked your mother to marry me, 'n' she refused, 'n' she was right, tew. Mebbe she'll change her mind, 'n' dew it yet. But that don't make a mite o' diff'rence — not a mite. What's mine's hern, all the same." Then seeing that Phil shook his head a little, he added: —

"I'm a man o' my word, 'n' Sam Sanders here's a witness."

Phil seemed satisfied, or at least silenced; and soon after fell into another lethargy, or doze, from which he started as before: —

"Mother, *Mother*, MOTHER! Alone and poor!"

"Philip, my dear boy! Do you want'er kill yer old friend? Ye might's well's talk so! Oh, if I had a lawyer, I'd fix it all so ye could n't be so hard on poor ole Zury no more! I'd deed the whole on it, I would — 'n' joyf'ly!"

"Alone and poor," mumbled the sufferer, scarcely knowing what Prouder had said, or what he himself was saying.

"Oh, my God! Can't I do noth'n? My tongue's tied, between the livin' 'n' the dyin' so I can't say what's in my heart to my boy! Here, my son, — look at me a half a minute! Here in my ole pocketbook's money 'n' good notes for risin' nine thaousan' dollars, besides trash. Sam! Say, you Sam! See me give 'n' transfer this h'yer puss'n'l prop'ty to Philip McVey, t' have 'n' t' hold, to be his'n, live er die, 'n' mine no longer!"

"I see you, Uncle Zury," answered Sam.

Even Phil seemed, with the physical possession of this little fortune, to perceive that his filial anxiety as to the provision for his mother and sister was no longer reasonable. He clutched the fat wallet on his breast, and tried to smile at the giver.

"Could n't ye call me Daddy, jes' once, my boy?"

"Daddy, Daddy, ye deserve it if ye keep yer word — an' ye will!"

"Might n't I kiss ye jes' once, — son?"

"If ye kin find a place, Daddy, that ain't — biled."

And the trembling grizzled lips rested a little while on that pitiful strip of forehead. Then the poor old soul sank into a heap at the head of Phil's cot, and was still.

Zury's attention was attracted by the entrance of the doctor, who called him, and said to him in a low voice: —

"That thar young gal whose mother was hurt 's a-comin' in."

"Oh, don't let her," cried Phil, who had been roused by the movement.

"I'm coming, Phil! Don't send me off! Oh, please — Dear Phil, don't kill me!"

"Well — put the lights where they won't shine on me. So! Oh, Annie!" he murmured, with blistered tongue in shapeless mouth.

The dear girl knelt by him, and soiled her sweet lips in his damp and grimy hair.

"I thought you went on the train, Annie!"

"Oh, Phil!" (reproachfully). "Have n't you learned to know me yet?"

She put her arm around his head for the first time in her life.

"Have you forgiven me, Annie?"

"I've been trying not to, Phil, for almost twenty-four hours! That was a long time for me to be angry with my own love, don't you think? I don't know whether I could have kept on trying much longer—if it had n't been for *this*, I might have tried a while longer. But *this* puts it all away, far away, out of sight! I don't care for anything now, but *this*!"

"It was bad, though, was n't it?"

"Yes; especially seeing that it went on after you knew me."

"Oh, if I'd known you a *little* sooner!"

Then he felt her left hand around his head, and reached up a bandaged and misshapen paw, and grasped the pure, translucent fingers and lifted them where he could see them once more. Not an imperfection or blemish except on the forefinger where were those thousands of needle-marks. She saw him look at them.

"My hands would have worked for you and yours, Phil, whenever you came and asked for them."

She had again forgotten her little speech prepared for refusing him.

"Annie," he whispered, "can't you put the light so I can see you and you not see me? There

— down on the opposite side of the bed — so! I don't want you to carry *this* picture of me in your memory — looking like this!”

It was difficult to make out his words, try as hard as he might, with his failing strength and faculties, to make them understood. Then he gazed on her face with glazing eyes that seemed to thrust away Death itself in their longing to keep their hold on that beloved vision. But at last they slowly closed, and then Annie sank on her knees at his side, and sobbed and prayed, and prayed and sobbed, till some one came and begged her to go away. She only asked if her mother wanted her, and learning that she was still asleep, resumed her kneeling vigil.

Once more Phil, in his delirium, said aloud: “Mother! MOTHER!” and the sound floated out of the open window into the darkness. Just then an emigrant wagon headed westward passed the station, and from it might have been heard, if any one had listened, a kind of distorted echo: —
“By God!”

And the vehicle labored on and disappeared.

While Annie was still kneeling, sobbing, and praying, Phil grew more restless and feverish, wakeful and flighty. He would try, in his imperfect utterance, to say, “Mother,” “Oh, Meg!” “Mother, mother!” and once in gentle tones: —
“Annie! Oh, Annie!”

She rose and kissed his forehead, but he did not know her.

Again she was urged to leave the unfit place,

but in vain. Then Phil chanced to say, in a questioning, chiding, expostulatory tone : —

“Dolly? Dolly? Why, Dolly!” and then she silently got up and went away.

Then Zury was alone with the poor fellow in his wanderings; now painless, thanks to the merciful provision that ends anguish when death has become inevitable and imminent. Phil’s mind strayed farther and farther backward into past years as it lost its hold on the present and future.

“It was *not* the axe, I tell you! It was the grindstone.”

Zury bent over him and met his unrecognizing gaze.

“Oh, I — I guess you can’t understand — of course you can’t! But mother will understand! *Mother* will know!” and a sweet smile of perfect, restful confidence shone about his eyes. “Mother — and Meg! Meg understands *everything*!”

Toward morning all his maundering ceased; and Zury observed that the poor head began to roll and turn wearily from side to side. He roused the tired doctor and called his attention to the new circumstance. The doctor nodded and said : —

“That ’s about the last.”

When day broke Sam Sanders awoke all feverish from a long stupor; and then he saw that they had pulled the sheet up over the face of what had been Phil McVey. And there at the

bed's head, in a crushed heap, crouched poor Zury Prouder ; like a great hulk, wrecked just as it was entering its longed-for harbor.

When some men came to attend to the dead, one of them laid his hand on Zury, who climbed painfully to his feet and groped his way to the wall, against which he leaned helplessly. Then, after binding up the dropped chin, they came to the hands still clutched about a worn, dirty, plethoric pocket-book. They asked some questions about this, and turning to Zury said : —

“ They say this is yours.”

“ They lie.”

“ Well, will you take charge of it for the dead man's folks ? ”

“ No, I won't.”

They laughed at his violence, and thought he was crazed by grief, until Sam called from his couch : —

“ I want to see the doctor.” Then when the doctor came, Sam added : “ Doctor, take that to Miss Annie Masten, daughter of the lady whose arm was broke — and tell her where 't was found. She'll know what to do with it.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE VIGILANTES.

ON the same afternoon with the wreck, near nightfall, there were gathered in the village store, near by, an unusual crowd; railroad-hands, villagers, and neighboring farmers. It was there made known that during the time when the track-gang was working beyond the curve, the spikes had been drawn from one rail by some stranger, so that the moment the push-car struck that joint the rail tipped over and let the car down, load and all.

“Who could it ‘a’ be’n?”

“God knows — or the devil, one or t’other.”

“The devil, likely. ‘N’ he must ‘a’ raked hell with a fine-tooth comb t’ find a —— mean enough to send on this jawb.”

“Ef he’d jest let us git a holt on the feller he’d git his pet-lamb back on his hands pootty blamed sudden.”

At this timely suggestion there arose from all sides expressions of assent, expressed in Western paraphrase. “Yew bet!” “I reckon!” “No mistake!” “Naow ye ‘re a-talkin’!” “Sure as shewtin’!” “Stan’ from under!”

Then said one of the laborers, an intelligent foreigner: —

"In Tcharmany, dey'll put de feller in de tchail fer — long as he stay alive; an longer too!"

"Oh, *we* would n' putt a man in jail fer a leetle thing like that."

"No put 'im in de tchail! Vy, in my goundry ve put 'im in de tchail ven he valk on de drack so eben!"

"Wal, in this country, ef a feller walks on the track 'n' don't git off in time, we kill him. But fer jest ditchin' a train, 'n' killin' tew er three, we don't putt nobody in no jail."

"Vat is dat? You don' do nottings to 'im?"

"I did n't say that. I said that if we caught this feller, we would n't trouble no jail with him."

"How den?"

The other raised his left hand to his ear, snapped his fingers, and suddenly extended his arm full length pointing to the sky.

"Ach, zo! De gourt veel dry 'im and hang 'im."

"Won't trouble no court t' hang him, wet or dry."

Here one of the village elders spoke.

"Better let the law take its course, if we find the hell-hound, as I hope we shall."

"Ah, yah! Law to take its course! Caounty putt t' more 'n a thaous'n' dollars expense — no livin' witness — none on us qualified t' set ontew th' jewry coz we've formed a pootty considable right smart chance of an opinion 't th' feller 'd oughter hang — 'n' so he goes free! Not any o' that kind o' sugar in mine, I thankee!"

"Ner mine!" "Ner mine!"

At this moment the door opened, and there entered a figure that showed more evidence of violence than poor dead Jim Sanders's body itself. His clothes were in rags, his face was beaten to a jelly, his eyes almost sightless and almost invisible, and his shirt covered with blood. After a few seconds of silence, during which all gazed on the victim and he in turn looked stupidly forward, covering his bruised eyes and trying to get them accustomed to the light, some one said: —

"Wal, pard — was yew intew th' smash-up? Hain't ye saw th' doctors?"

"Gimme suth'n' t' drink," moaned the new-comer.

The storekeeper filled a glass with whiskey, but was restrained from presenting it.

"Hold on! Mebbe this h'yer 's th' man we wuz a-talkin' abaout, 'n' wishin' t' come acrost. Hold that door, one on ye! Naow, pard; give an accaount o' yerself. Whar be ye frum — whar be ye a-goin' — 'n' dew ye know anythin' abaout this h'yer wreck?"

"I know all abaout it; 'n' I'll tell ye all I know — but gimme s'm whiskey, fer God's sake."

He tried to wipe the blood from his mouth before drinking, but yet when he handed back the empty glass there were two red streaks streaming down its two sides. He approached the counter, took a sheet of wrapping-paper, and pressed it on his face; then turned it to the light to see the

stains ; then sat down and let his liquor-warmed tongue begin to wag.

“D’ye know Burr Hobbs ?”

“B’-God Hobbs ? Swearin’ Hobbs ? th’t lived aout east over th’ caounty line ?”

“Ya-as.”

“Him as hed a critter killed by th’ Pioneer, ’n’ then got beat in his trile with th’ railroad ? Why, he lit aout fer Ioway, a week ago.”

“That’s all a lie. He’s be’n a-layin’ low, watchin’ aout along th’ road t’ see what’d be a good place t’ ditch a train, ’n’ what time th’ Pioneer’d be a-passin’ by the place.”

A long, low murmur of intense interest, horror, hatred, wild anger, and thirst for quick vengeance ran through the listening circle.

“Who be yew ?” one asked.

“I’m John Felser — some on ye must know me — Burr Hobbs’s hired man.”

“Ya-as — I know him naow.” “So dew I.”

“Wal, John, mebbe ye wuz ontew this h’yer job tew ; same ’s Swearin’ Hobbs wuz.”

“Naw, I worn’t ! Ef I hed ’a’ be’n, would I ’a’ be’n putt in this h’yer fix ?”

“Thasso — thasso !”

Then he told them how Hobbs had started him, with the wife, the wagon, and the live stock, forward with orders to camp at the place where the wagon-road crosses the creek, near the railroad bridge. That they had gone on as ordered ; that Hobbs had overtaken them and boasted loudly of his doings in disturbing the track ; and

afterward had left them and gone back to gloat over the result of his crime.

"Then did ye have a fuss with him when he come back t' th' wagin?"

"Ya-as."

"What abaout?"

"Oh, that ain't nuther h'yer ner thar."

"Mebbe ye 'llaowed he wuz a bloody-minded murderer."

"Ya-as."

"'N' then he pitched inter ye 'n' half killed ye, 'n' yet let ye go alive arter all."

"Ya-as."

"Naow, look a-h'yer, pards: I vote th't this h'yer yarn don't stand t' reason. This h'yer galoot did n' never tell Burr Hobbs no sech a thing — he ain't th' kind of a sucker t' git himself inter no sech a kind of a scrape. Ef he hain't got no better yarn ner that, we'll hev to hold him till we look funder inter this h'yer job." To this all assented, and then one said: —

"Wal, John, ye h'yer th' sense o' th' meet'n. Got anythin' more t' say?"

"Oh — he licked me. Ain't that enough?"

"What fer d' he lick ye?"

John did not answer. The others gathered in knots and talked in whispers; such chance syllables as he caught being of anything but a reassuring nature. He grew more and more uneasy, and looked around him for relief or escape; but there was always one stout form leaning against the closed door and clusters of others around the

two windows. Time passed. The one glass of whiskey was losing its influence, and he was shivering with fear, and pain, and loss of blood.

"Gimme s' more whiskey," he said at last.

"Wal, friend John; we're a-talkin' this h'yer thing over, 'n' ef th' counsel of some is to be took, why — ye wun't need no more, John."

"Oh, Lord! Gimme s' more whiskey, 'n' I'll tell ye th' fax."

"Better n't ye tell us th' fax fust off, John — in case th' whiskey 'd be wasted on ye?"

"Oh, no! Gimme s'm whiskey, fer God's sake! I can't talk 'thaout s' more whiskey."

"Oh, let him have some, whether we — whether er no."

After another full glass of the fiery stuff had disappeared, John said: —

"Me 'n' Mis. Hobbs wuz jist a-settin' on th' front seat o' th' wagin, not a-doin' noth'n' ner a-sayin' noth'n'. She was sick 'n' tired with camp-in' aout, a-hidin' along th' road sence we begun a-movin', 'n' — she might a jest laid her head onter my shoulder fer — oh, not a half a minute!"

"Did ye have yer arm 'raound her, John?"

"No, sir, I did n't! 'N' ef I did that worn't nuther h'yer ner thar! 'N' then Burr he got back quicker ner we expected. I heered suth'n, 'n' I jes' thort it wuz th' hosses a-trompin' whar the' wuz tethered. An' it wuz Burr. She seed him fust 'n' she hollered. An' Burr he kep' a-comin' on, 'n' she begun t' git scairt, 'n' sez she, 'Burr Hobbs, don't ye tech a han' tew him!"

It's all my fault! It's all your fault fust, 'n' it's all my fault last! Ef ye'd be'n a man instead of a wild beast I'd a loved ye ferever! An' naow I hate ye — ye murderer — I do — I do' — 'n' then she begun a-screechin' 'n' Burr he pulled me daown, 'n' th' fust clip he give me wuz right h'yer" (he put his hand behind his ear) "'n' it knocked me silly, so I could n't do *nothin'*! 'N' then he licked me in th' wagin 'n' aout on it, 'n' daown on th' graoun', 'n' up agin till I — come away. 'N' Mis. Hobbs, she a-hollerin' all th' time. I heered her till I got off a right smart of a piece, a-screechin' fer dear life. I 'xpeck he half-killed her, tew!"

"John, I reckon ye 'r' a-tellin' th' trewth naow — er part of it. Wal, pards; I guess aour dooty 's clear."

"But, thunder!" cried another. "Hobbs 'll be gone before this! He would n't never stay raound after a-sendin' John off in sech a fix as that!"

"Wal" — stammered John, "Burr hain't stirred, I 'll warrant ye — 'cause — like as not he 'llaows I would n't dairst t' tell. Ye see he 'd lie; 'n' 'llaow I knowed all about th' wreck afore it happened. Oh, he 'll lie, 'n' swear tew it tew, ye kin bet yer life!"

"'N' yew 'll swear t' other way, John."

"Ya-as; I 'll swear on a stack o' Bibles, that I never knowed" —

"Thar, thar! Nemmind abaout that. I guess yew 'n' Burr 'll hev t' come face to face afore we git threw with this h'yer jawb."

Then followed a wild time — John begging and praying to be let off from going back to face Hobbs again, and the others guarding every outlet and grimly insisting that his safety would depend on his own conduct — and subsequent developments.

“Don’t tear yer shirt, John; we don’t ’llaow t’ see ye hurt; not th’ way we feel naow. But it’s all owin’ t’ haow th’ cat jumps.”

“Gentlemen,” cried the storekeeper, “this h’yer store is about to shut up for to-night. Ye all know I’ve got property to lose and trade to take care of. Jest be fair enough not t’ do nor say nothin’ h’yer in my store that might compromise me, or putt words in my ears that I might be forced t’ talk with my mouth if I was put on th’ witness-stand before a court ’n’ jury.”

This was agreed to, *nem. con.*, and the men began to gather outside; John’s custodians sticking to him “like shells to a clam.” But one man busied himself about the corner of the store where bed-cord and clothes-lines were kept, and soon approached the counter with a coin in his hand and a small package hidden under his coat.

“I guess we owe you this, Tom, fer whiskey — ’n’ — one thing another. An’ come t’ think, my o’ woman wanted me t’ git a couple o’ yards o’ fact’ry cotton, ’n’ a ball o’ twine. She wants t’ make th’ young ’uns some handkerchers, ’n’ tie ’em fast so the’ can’t lose ’em;” which translucent fiction the storekeeper chose to treat as sober fact. (But he slipped the coin back in the customer’s pocket before the latter got out of the door.)

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RUDE JUSTICE UNDER TALL TREES.

A WHITE covered wagon, gleaming in the fitful light of a waning fire, beside which sits a gaunt man, wary and watchful, his rifle lying across his knees. The continual rustle of the upper foliage is the only sound that breaks the stillness, except an occasional snap in the fire, the snort of a horse, or the moan of a calf which is tethered to keep its mother from straying, and the lowing answer of the mother as she stops her browsing to look toward her young. At length the man, overcome by the day's labors and excitements, gives way to the reaction, begins to nod, and falls asleep, rifle still in hand.

The man, Burr Hobbs, is roused from his doze by the furious barking of his dog, and awakes to find all the animals, horses, cows, sheep, pigs, and dog, in a state of excitement and alarm, gazing out into the surrounding darkness.

"Make ready!" shouts a voice, and he turns his rifle suddenly in that direction and cocks it, but as he does so, he hears the click of a dozen gunlocks on all sides of him; as if in echo of his own.

"Burr Hobbs," calls the same voice; "throw up yer hands!" Instantly the crash of Hobbs's rifle rings through the forest and comes back in broken echoes from the further side of the invisible water-course. Fool as ever, he has thrown away his one defense!

"Don't shoot!" calls the same voice. "That's his only shot! Recover arms, and forward!"

But the voice was too late as to one of the party, whose rifle rang out in answer to Hobbs's; and the latter's right arm dropped powerless to his side, letting his useless gun plunge forward into the embers, scattering a thousand sparks and starting up a blaze that showed a narrowing circle of ghastly white cotton masks, through each of which gleamed a pair of eyes above a leveled gun-barrel, carried at recover.

"Elihu, gather that thar gun aouter th' fire afore it gits spile't. Burr Hobbs, yer shewtin' at me makes yer arrest easier ner what we thort; but it 'd 'a' hed t' come, even ef ye 'd 'a' hit me."

"Wha' d' ye want o' me?" (His curses must be omitted.)

"Ye 're charged with ditchin' a train, 'n' killin' one er more 'Merikin citizens, contrairy t' th' statoot in sech case made 'n' pervided. Naow, ye need n't rare 'n' pitch; coz yer' a-goin' t' hev a fair trile. Be ye guilty er not guilty?"

A piece of disgusting insolence was the only reply.

"When a prisoner refuses t' plead, the custom in this h'yer free country is t' enter not guilty —

'specially when ye kin prove it ontew him whether er no. Call John Felser."

The miserable informer was dragged forward by the two men who had kept him in charge and forced him to accompany the party. When Hobbs saw him he grew insane with fury, grabbed a brand from the fire, and started toward him. But as he stooped for the brand his broken arm hung down and struck hard on the ground, driving the ends of bone past each other, and changing his howl of rage into a shriek of pain that unmanned one of his assailants—the one who had fired on him—and compelled him to go back and get out of sight and hearing.

Hobbs himself was faint and sat down on his log, nursing the wounded arm. The leader went and stood near him, and to him Hobbs said almost in a whisper:—

"Got any whiskey abaout ye?"

"Don't use it myself; but I guess some o' th' boys kin accommodate ye. H'yer, you fellers; who's got any whiskey? Don't all speak to wunst."

A flask was soon produced, and Hobbs drained it at one long drink. Then he said:—

"No need t' set that haound pup a-spewin' aout his ** gab. Only whatever he says is lies unless he owns up that he knowed all about th' wreck afore it wuz begun and while it wuz a-goin' on, 'n' after it got threw; 'n' never would 'a' opened his ** jaw ef I hed n't 'a' licked him fer—fer"—
Here he broke down and cried like a child.

After a few moments he went on : —

“I don’t ask my life — only be quick with yer killin’. I hain’t noth’n’ t’ live fer, God knows ! Haounded as I’ve be’n all my life ! Hell’ll be a comfort tew me ! Only be quick ; ’n’ let me see *him* git th’ same as I dew. I don’t want t’ go whar I can’t git my han’s on *him* ! Wunst more — that’s all I ask !” And he went again, for the last time, into one of his frenzies — one arm dangling and dripping blood.

At a word from the leader the party gathered about him and began moving him toward the railroad bridge, though most of them would have liked to make short work with his blasphemy and his life.

“H’yer boys ! Look aout — don’t hurt his arm ! Whar’s that rope ? Gimme abaout four foot offen th’ eend — I’ll make a sling ’t he kin carry it intew.”

Hobbs looked with languid, half-drunken curiosity at the coil of rope, as if judging its strength and fitness for its manifest purpose. After the sling was fitted he walked along, but suddenly stopped and burst out : —

“Oh, men — don’t keep this a-goin’ any longer ! Putt me aout o’ this, quick ! Here’s a dozen guns — why can’t one on ye be man enough to kill me offhand ?”

“Step on, brother Hobbs. Shewtin’ ain’t provided as the means of executin’ the law in Ellenoy. Step right along now, ’n’ think o’ the state of yer soul, what time ye’ve got t’ spare.”

"Oh, damn my soul! Gimme s' more whiskey!"

The train that carried to Galena Zury, and Annie, and the fireman Sam, and their beloved dead, as it passed over the bridge near which Hobbs had encamped the night before, shook and set to swinging a ghastly object which hung from the lower chord of the span, — the body of a man, shabbily clothed and hatless, the distorted face surrounded with buzzing insects, one arm held up in a sling, around which the other hand was clasped — strange sight in that wild solitude, between the steep banks of the creek, and so hidden from the glare of the hot morning sun that any chance wanderer might almost have run against it before observing that it was not one of the ordinary and usual features of the place.

A lively discussion arose after the vigilantes left the scene of the execution, as to what should be done with John Felser.

"Jest exactly as bad as t' other, 'n' wuss if anythin'!"

"'N' lots o' rope left."

"Thasso, thasso! Pity t' waste s' much good rope, s' long as sech bait as John Felser's above groun'."

"Oh, wal — pards — we 've took him as state's evidence, 'n' that settles it."

"Wal; moughten't we 'baout's well jes' pass the rope kinder gentle-like *wunst* 'raound his neck 'n' swing him up a *leetle* way up a *small*

tree — jest t' incouridge him t' leave th' State, 'n' remind him not t' come back no more ef he knows whut 's wholesome fer him?"

They were spared the trouble of settling this question by finding that the Hobbs camp was broken up and the whole caravan already out of sight when they got back to its late location. Away into Iowa they sped, where (according to later accounts received through Balty Felser from his brother John) Hobbs's widow turned the tables on mankind by leading her third husband almost as abject a life as had been meted out to herself by her second.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A GREAT WAVE OF HERO-WORSHIP.

DR. STRAFFORD met his grief with stout heart and in good man-fashion. He asked no permission; he simply told Margaret that he had provided the means for taking her and her mother to Galena in the shortest possible time. The way could now all be traveled by rail; and their journey was without expense, as both railroads voluntarily provided free transportation for the family of the dead engineer, whose devoted heroism was flashed over the country the day after the disaster.

Such acts were not then as common as they have since become. This one touched the popular heart in a tender spot, and there arose from all around a cry of sympathy and admiration;—a spasm of that hero-worship which humanity from time to time feels with such intensity.

Anne and Meg reached Galena they scarce knew how; and put on the mourning garb the Mastens had provided for them, taking a certain kind of unconscious comfort in the deep black that so harmonized with their despair.

After long talks with fireman Sam Sanders and others, Strafford wrote a detailed narrative

of all the occurrences; the first portion devoted to the accident, and the last to the sudden and swift vengeance which had overtaken its wretched author; the whole filling the entire "third page" in the next issue of the "Bugle," and being set off by the mourning lines which country papers use, producing this striking appearance by the simple process of turning the "column-rules" upside down.

But before this could reach Springville, get into print, and travel back to Galena, a public meeting had been called in Springville, and it was attended by all the leading men of the young city. Resolutions were passed; one expressing respect for the dead hero, who had "been born and grown up among us and reflected honor on his native city by the manner of his life and of his death;" another offering condolence to the surviving members of his family, "respected by all their fellow-citizens and beloved by those who know them;" another begging that Springville might be the place of Phil's interment, and that its citizens might be allowed to provide the burial lot and defray the funeral expenses. Hundreds of dollars were at once pledged; and the resolutions were handsomely copied and forwarded to Mrs. McVey, at Galena.

Strafford, in Galena, had received a telegram asking that no final arrangements for the funeral should be made until these resolutions should be received; and found no difficulty in complying with the request, the coroner's inquest having to

be held, and the railway company's ice-house being placed at his disposal.

"They are very kind!"

These words, faint, cold, shrinking, and repellent, were all that Anne could at first be brought to utter. But — happily for her life and her sanity — something *must* be settled. So she allowed her friends to arrange all as they thought best.

A document relinquishing any possible claim against the railroad company was presented by the company "as a matter of form," and signed by her as a matter of course. Then two special cars were provided, one with open side-doors, to hold the bier, and another, a passenger-car, to carry the funeral party. Both were draped in mourning. The coffin was beautifully clothed in evergreens and flowers.

Mr. Masten, Zury Prouder, Dr. Strafford, and Perry Fenton were the other members of the little party. Sore, sore was the grief of Annie Masten when it became evident that she must stay at home! But — the matter was too clear even for doubt. There was her mother, with a painful injury needing constant care, there was the house to be carried on and the children to provide for; and even if these difficulties could possibly have been surmounted, there was suffering Sam Sanders! Phil's devoted friend, who had been wounded almost to death in Phil's service! After a terrible scene with Margaret, wherein her weakness dragged on Meg's strength

like a mistletoe on an oak, she suddenly checked her sobs and said: —

“But what difference does it make? My life is dead; why should I care how, or when, or where it is buried? I do not! So good-by, darling — best and brightest — don’t forget me — remember me as the poor girl who hoped to be your sister, — but who is dead, and her heart buried in the grave of your brother.”

Even as the melancholy cortège left the Galena station, the bereaved mother and sister began to feel the intrusion of public sympathy; unwelcome, almost abhorrent, yet wholesome. A large concourse of people (the temperance society and others) stood with bared heads to bid them farewell. All the engines available were run out on parallel tracks, and each kept its bell slowly tolling as the funeral cars passed between them. The effect was wonderfully solemn and affecting.

While they were running southward over the bright, open prairie, Margaret put back her veil and began the painful task of facing the world again. She gently insisted on her mother’s once more looking up, morally and physically.

“See, Mamma dear; there are only dear friends in the car, and bright sunshine outside. The world has to go on. You and I are alive, and sane, and we must remain so.”

“Oh, don’t, my love. Do let me alone!”

“You may be angry with me, if you like — but we must both remember that there are other peo-

ple in the world besides our two selves. Here are Mr. Prouder, and Dr. Strafford, and Mr. Masten, and Mr. Fenton. They are all sharing our sorrow, no matter how much we try to make it seem that we are alone in it."

At length she prevailed on the suffering woman to lift her veil to the blessed light of day, and to recognize, first the friends near by, and, later, the sympathizing world outside. Each engine they met or passed during the endless day tolled its bell solemnly as long as they were within hearing; and at the stations where they stopped a line of people passed reverently through the open car containing the coffin; and some grave, wide-eyed faces peered in at their windows with a mixture of sympathy and curiosity that was both very touching and very trying.

Annie had given to her father the wallet found in Phil's dead hands, to be given to Mrs. McVey at some convenient time and place; and the good man, with the lack of tact often shown by those persons who are most conscious of single-hearted benevolence and purity of purpose, chose the time while all were traveling together in the funeral car. The moment Zury observed Mr. Masten bring out the well-known wallet, he left the car and betook himself to the most distant part of the train. Anne, also, instantly recognized the old pocketbook, and listened in grief and wonder to the tale of its history since the night of Phil's death. Then she said, simply and decidedly: —

"It is out of the question. I cannot take it."

The minister was at a loss to know how to meet this set-back. He looked around for Mr. Prouder, and, not finding him, appealed for aid and counsel to Dr. Strafford. The doctor approached with some natural hesitation, but she cut him short.

"Dr. Strafford; please to help me defend myself against mistaken kindness. I cannot take any money from Mr. Prouder — nor from any one else, unless it be money which I have earned."

"It is not from Mr. Prouder that this comes to you. It is from Philip."

"That is a mere juggle of words. The property belongs to Mr. Prouder. Will you not help me to maintain that against — everybody?"

"I would if it were true."

"You decline your assistance, then! Very well — Mr. Fenton! May I speak with you a moment?"

"Mrs. McVey."

"Please help me! Some one *must* help me!"

"We are all anxious to do so — wish for nothing else — think of nothing else. What can I do?"

"Oh, I ought not to have to ask you! You have been so devotedly kind, ever since my poor boy" —

"Please not talk so! It seems as if you resented my claim to be called Phil's friend! I prize that thought dearly, and if you will show me how I can serve you, I shall think I hear

heaven opening, and Phil's voice calling me 'Friend!' all the way from there here."

"I know you loved each other, but that need not prevent my thanking you for your goodness, need it?"

"Yes, I think it should. You ought not to thank me any more than you would thank him. You ought to call upon me as a matter of course, just as you would call upon him. Now tell me what I can do for you."

"Well—you know that Mr. Prouder, who loved Phil as much as—you did"—(the widow smiled as she made this honey-sweet comparison) "Mr. Prouder learned while our darling lay waiting for death that the thought of the future poverty of his mother and sister was adding a pang to his sufferings. And Mr. Prouder soothed his last moments by making—by trying to make to us, through him, a very valuable gift. He put into his poor hands this pocket-book, which is said to contain more than nine thousand dollars."

Here the poor soul thrust upon him the old wallet, now more disfigured than ever, being stained with finger-marks made by the oil with which Phil's dying hands had been anointed.

"Mr. Prouder made the gift freely, did he not?"

"Yes, freely and gladly, I believe from my soul! But—there are circumstances which make it impossible for me to accept the money."

"If you'll excuse my saying so, the circumstances must be *very* strong which could necessi-

tate your giving your son's property to a third person who has no claim to it."

"They are strong. Yes, I'll excuse your saying that, if you will allow *me* to say that, not being able to give my reasons, I do not ask for advice as to who must have the property, but only as to how to get it to him."

"Then of course I can only set myself at work to get him to take it."

"Thank you. Will you carry it with you, please?"

"I shall always do exactly what you request. Now this, in my hands, is a trust; to be held 'for whom it may concern.' I cannot by any act of mine change the legal ownership and right of possession, you know."

"Oh, no. But I hope you can prevail on Mr. Prouder to take it, that being my — wish. Not that my mere wish should have any especial weight with him" (she added, hurriedly), "but that is my firm and unalterable resolution. I *must* get rid of this burden and get back to my work, or I shall *die*!"

So with a heavy heart and pocket, Perry Fenton went to the other car, where Zury had isolated himself.

"Mr. Prouder—I've got a tough job on hand."

"What is that?" he asked, with assumed interest and unconsciousness. "Anything for the real benefit of — the McVeys?"

"Yes; and I want your help."

"That's the best news I ever heard, or ever can hear."

"Mrs. McVey wants you to take back this great gift of yours, and I have promised to help her to succeed; and I can't do it unless you coincide and join with me to do what she wishes — just that you will naturally — *take it!*" And he held it out.

The hard look settled on Zury's face in a way that might have reminded one of the old stern days of the "me-eanest ma-an." Said he (his agitation driving all *artificial* speech out of his head): —

"Young man, ef ye've undertook that jawb, ye'll find ye've bit off more'n ye kin chaw!"

"You won't take it?"

"You know I wun't!"

Perry turned the slighted treasure in his hands, grave and puzzled, yet glad at heart. Then Zury added: —

"If you won't try to come any snap game on me — leaving me in possession jist because I took a holt of the property, I'd like t' look over them things a half a minute."

"Oh, yes — I'll take it back whenever you say so."

"Well — lay it down on the table thar — I don't accept anything — it ain't mine, nor wun't be — you're the custodian same as ever, you know?"

Perry nodded, and the other, slowly at first, but later with the knowledge and rapidity that

showed how familiar to him was the book and everything in it, handled over its contents once more.

"There's the money — no need t' count that."

"Oh, that reminds me of what I thought of as soon as I heard of your generous gift to our poor dying boy. You left yourself penniless! Now, I've got plenty of cash with me — how much do you want?"

"Nothing. Zury Praouder's check on the Springville Bank is good all over Ellenois."

Then seeing that Fenton looked a little mortified at having his money a second time refused when freely offered him, he said: —

"Well — I'd jest as lief give you a check for fifty's anybody else — but we'll fix that by and by. Now, here's these notes — some of 'em are gettin' past due. They ought to be attended tew. There's one — good's old wheat in the mill — comes due to-morrow." And he quietly wrote his name on the back.

So he went over them, by dozens and scores, characterizing them as he went.

"Good's wheat." "Good if he's pushed." "Security'll make that O. K." "That one's got a good indorser." "Good as old wheat." "Good as old wheat in the mill." "Trash." "Trash." And so on. He indorsed all those which were good, and laid the "trash" in a pile by itself.

"Yes — rising nine thousand without the interest; countin' interest, mebbe six hundred more. Now this trash — mebbe might some of it turn out,

after all." And he proceeded to indorse them like the others.

"Now, with my name on the backs, the trash is jest as good as the rest! So you jest take this back to the widder McVey and tell her it's grown from nine up to over eleven; and she'd better stop fooling with it or it'll ruin me!"

"Would n't you — compromise it somehow — say if she'll take the ready money you'll receive back the notes?"

"I don't take any gift from her! She had n't ought to expect it, nor to ask it. Her boy loved me well enough" —

Here his words became inaudible, and Fenton watched the tears find their devious way down his wrinkles until the dimness of his own eyes blurred the touching sight.

"Phil loved me well enough to take a leetle bit of my spare property. She don't think enough of me to take any gift from me — of course — and I don't ask her to. Phil took it, and that settled it. Nôw I don't think enough of her to take money from her! No, *sir*!"

"What must I tell her?"

"Tell her just what I say. Tell her if she'll take the money I'll take back the notes — on one condition; and that is that she'll tell me where to put the money for her from each note as fast as it's paid off."

"I suppose you will go and see her, if she wishes it?"

"Oh, yes — I never refused to see her — but once." (Here a spasm of pain and regret passed over his face.)

So Perry went back from his bootless errand and reported progress. As nearly as possible he repeated every word of the interview.

"Oh, dear! Have I not enough distress without having this forced upon me?"

Fenton was silent, and Anne sat there in her old position of trouble, supporting her elbow with one hand while she tapped on her lips with the other.

After a while the crafty Fenton said: —

"Suppose we leave it to Mr. Masten. He, being a clergyman, is well used to hearing and settling differences between good people."

What argument could Anne urge in opposition to this most reasonable proposal? None; so she declined it peremptorily, well knowing that it was simply a way for forcing her to take the money.

"I should be quite willing to take Mr. Masten's advice; and I would abide by it; provided that doing so did not conflict with my own ideas of propriety."

Fenton smiled at this truly womanly proviso; and said: —

"Then I suppose I may as well leave this with you. But you know there are papers in it which need immediate attention."

"I am not responsible for that."

"Well; I must really ask you for further in-

structions. Shall I bring or send Mr. Proudor to see you ? ”

“ Certainly not, at present. Can you not yourself attend to the necessary matters you speak of, Mr. Fenton ? ”

“ Most willingly — provided it is for you that I do so.”

“ That would be as bad as ever. Well ; on the whole, perhaps I must see Mr. Proudor and insist on my right to make—to undo this attempted benefaction.”

When Anne gave her hand to her old lover on his return she could not but be touched to the heart at the sight of his woe-begone face. He seemed to be aged fully ten years by Phil’s cruel death. All seemed over for him in this world — no more hope or fear or joy remained for him, nor even any sorrow save the one. Her tears flowed afresh, but his older fountains were wept dry.

“ Mrs. McVey, I understand you ’ve a wish to see me.”

As soon as Anne could find her voice she replied : —

“ Yes, Mr. Proudor. You ’ve done many kindnesses in times past — now I want you to oblige me *just once* more — take back this property, and let me feel that I am not profiting by my son’s death ! ”

“ It would be Anne McVey that would have to profit by it, if anybody could be said to do so ; not Zury Prauder. Your boy took care of his

mother whilst he lay dyin'. If you'd been there, as I was, you'd never have tried to undo his blessed work!"

"Oh, I can't take this! And you know the reason why!"

She opened her hand and let the despised thing drop on the floor.

"Your boy'd be sorry t' see how ye treated his gift! He's sorry this minute, lookin' at ye, and maybe right h'yer, in hearin' of my voice."

"Will you force me to tell all here why I can't take it?"

"No — because I'll tell 'em myself. Friends! I've asked Mrs. McVey to marry me. She's a free woman, an' far too good for me, as all may see — none plainer than I see it myself — and so she would n't have me; and I solemnly agree before you all that I'll never ask her again. Now, that ought to make her free to take her son's little leavin's, no matter if they did once belong to me before he owned 'em."

Anne shook her head to show that that made no difference — did not touch her hidden repulsion against the money.

"Well — if that ain't enough, I've one thing more to say that may bring her to reason: — I don't want to be seemin' hard and impudent to an afflicted woman — but who is she that she presumes to give away what don't belong to her to give? There ain't but one half of her son's estate belongs to her any way. Unless Phil left a will makin' other disposition of it, one half goes to

Margaret McVey, accordin' to the statutes in such case made and provided, and the other half goes to Anne McVey ; and from her to Margaret if she survives her mother, unless the mother's made some other disposition of it in her life-time ! ”

“ My daughter Margaret is here to speak for herself, to anybody who imagines that she would go against her mother's wishes and ideas of what is right ! ”

“ Well — if she joins in with any such wrong-doin' as her mother is tryin' to force on to me, then all I've got to do is to go ! And I'll do it, too ; no matter if it parts me from them I love best in this world since Phil's gone to a better ! ”

“ Margaret ; speak to Mr. Prouder, dear ! Tell him you join in your mother's wish, and beg him not to break off our friendship with him.”

“ Mother ; do you leave it to me ? ”

“ Yes, my own dear daughter. But be gentle — as I know you will.”

“ Very well, then. Mr. Prouder, my mother leaves it to me — and I am on your side. She shall take the money and thank God for it ! If she will not, I will, for her ; and I will prize it just as highly coming from you through my dear dead brother, as if he had earned it all himself ! ”

She went to her mother and tried to seize her hands ; but Anne pulled them away and covered her face with them as if, her last stay having left her, she could no longer face the world. Being thus repelled Meg stood bewildered a moment, while Mr. Masten said : —

"Thank God for the maiden's wisdom, which has made the right to prevail!"

"To her be it, then," said Anne; "not to me — not to me."

So Margaret picked up the wallet, and taking a seat close to Zury's took one of his hands in hers while he laid the other caressingly on her curls.

"You'll take care of it for me, won't you, Uncle Zury?" said Meg, calling the old man for the first time by Phil's name for him.

As she said it she tried to lay the wallet on his knees; but he seemed to fear some surprise, and hastily moved so that it fell to the floor once more, whence she picked it up saying: —

"Do you think I don't mean what I say?"

"I was afraid — but ye would n't play a trick on your Uncle Zury, would ye?"

"No, indeed! It's mine!"

"Ye'll tell me what ye want done with it?"

"Yes, surely!"

"All?"

"Every cent."

"And it's t' be for your own benefit, not mine?"

"Yes, yes. I'll tell you now, if you like, how some shall be spent. A monument" —

But here her separate fortitude gave out, and she went weeping to her mother, and forced herself into her arms; where the two mingled their tears — literally — until at a sign from Strafford all the rest quietly withdrew and left the bereaved and bleeding hearts to wait for consolation together.

Zury and Perry Fenton walked back to the other car together. Zury was happier than he had been since the catastrophe.

"What's right 'll be what comes to pass, if it's rightly handled!"

"Yes! The good Lord guided all — through his servant Margaret McVey. Who'd have thought she had so much courage and common sense?"

"Who, Meg? You bet! The man who picks *her* up for a fool 'll set her down mighty quick!" Then after a pause he added: "You ain't married yet, I reckon?"

"No — worse luck!"

"'Llow t' marry?"

"Oh, yes — some time."

"Not bespoke neither?"

"No."

"What a splendid wife Meg McVey'd make for a good man like you!"

"Splendid! Too good ~~for~~ me."

"*She* wouldn't think so if you went at it right."

"Then she'd be mistaken! But she's out of the question for me, for reasons I can't explain."

"Would a hundred thousand, in her own right, settled on her and her children, make it any more feasible?"

"Not a whit. I'd never marry a woman with money that I wouldn't marry if she had n't a cent. I guess I'll have to tell you — I've lost my heart to another woman, who has n't a cent."

Zury sighed to think that his dear Meg must live and die an old maid — as he always knew she would.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SYMPATHY.

THAT was the longest afternoon and evening of life to poor Anne. She maintained a stony silence, brooding over her griefs, and when she found her tired mind wandering off to unbidden speculating as to what Margaret would do with her little fortune, she brought it back with a new pang—as if her own brain itself had turned traitor and was trying to make her false to the memory of her son. The monotonous rumble of the train was only broken by the occasional meeting with an engine, with its mournful “toll; toll; toll;” and the more frequent passing by a station with its inquisitive gazers crowding around the open doors of the car that carried the evergreen-covered coffin, and then some of them peering through the windows at the mourners.

After night, Anne fell into a troubled slumber, only to awake toward midnight, with a fresh memory of her sorrow. The train had stopped at a station (it was the cessation of noise which broke her rest); and in her car all seemed asleep, each huddled up in a mass on a seat by himself (as sleeping-cars were then unknown), and one of the sleepers was snoring audibly.

"Ugh!" she said to herself. "How he sleeps! Money, money; always money! Now that he has forced a great sum upon Phil's mother, in spite of herself, behold he can sleep! Because he has done what he thought his duty—and had his own way—as he always does—he can sleep like a great strong whale! And even snore! While I feel as if I could never sleep again, thinking of my lost boy!" And again she fell to crying, as if that had now become her constant occupation as long as she should live.

At the first pause in her weeping her thoughts reverted to the same channel.

"Money was his first consideration when he thought I was going to marry him! Oh, how can I ever be glad enough that I sent back his gift—not once, but twice! Firmly and—almost contemptuously!"

Fenton now saw that she was awake, and brought over a great fur cloak which he insisted on wrapping around her, saying that he had been waiting for a chance to do so without disturbing her.

When the train started again, she saw Stratford enter from the funeral car. He came and asked after her welfare, and explained that at each stopping-place he went forward and opened a side-door and stood guard while such friends and strangers passed through as might apply for permission. Each took a sprig of the evergreen, but the quantity was ample and all was in good order.

Anne was seized with a sudden craving to go once more to the presence of her dead ; and wrapping the fur cloak about her, she made Strafford conduct her across the intervening platform, waving him back when he would have entered with her.

She closed the door behind her, and steadied herself against the wall while she accustomed her eyes to the dim light shed by one lantern just visible in the distance. Then she moved slowly forward toward the dark mass that occupied the centre, and laid her hand on the bough-covered box.

As she did so, she saw before her the outline of a human form lying prone upon the coffin and embracing it. It was Zury Prouder ;— the noise of the train had prevented him from hearing her entrance.

A rush of jealous feeling came over her and she said :—

“Do you think you have any right to come between me and my dead boy ?”

Poor Zury started up, much distressed. He lifted his hand deprecatingly as he turned away, saying :—

“You can have all of him lies there. I can’t rob you of that. Neither can you rob me of the part of him that I carry in my heart.” Then he moved toward the door, turning his face from her and covering it with his hand.

Tears sprang from her eyes, and sobs for a moment choked her utterance. How he loved Phil!

He, so hard, so strong; bowed on that quiet coffin in patient suffering — until she came to drive him away with her cruel jealousy! His love and his anguish — so like hers that it ought to be a bond of sympathy — seized upon by her as a weapon with which to cut him to the quick! Oh, it was shameful! Ungrateful! Unwomanly.

She called his name; he either heard not or heeded not, and went out. She staggered to the door and made him hear her in spite of the roaring of the train. He paused a moment, and then came to her side.

"I don't want you to go away. I'll beg your pardon on my knees! Stay here with me, please." He still hesitated, and she added pleadingly, "I'm afraid in the dark. Don't you remember how afraid I always was in the dark? We can both stay here."

Indeed it was a grewsome place — the long car, empty except the black sepulchral mass in the centre, but alive with flying shadows, cast from the one lamp hanging in the farther end, swinging with the motion of the train. It seemed a simulacrum of the dark world; vast and shadowy; empty, except as it was filled with the presence of the dead Philip.

She held out her hand. Zury took it, and they walked toward the coffin, she on one side and he on the other. Then she held his hand in both hers and said: —

"You are strong!"

"Yes."

"I feel as if I could n't go through the rest of my life by my own strength!"

"You need n't do so."

"I will not."

Neither said anything more. Both felt that the bond of their common love for Phil could never be broken, and that nothing but death should part them from each other. When the slowing of the train and the sound of a distant tolling bell warned them that they were approaching a station, they made their way back to their own car; where the snorer (Mr. Masten) was still snoring, and where Anne soon fell asleep in Meg's arms and slept, with occasional interruptions, till dawn.

While they are asleep and forgetting their anguish for a time, let us fly back to the scene of the wreck of the Pioneer, and read a placard that made its appearance, most mysteriously, affixed to a tree near the station.

NOTICE!

Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.

The voice of the People is the voice of God.

The voice of the People cried for vengeance on Burr Hobbs who wrecked the Pioneer and shed the innocent blood of those victims.

The hand of the People took vengeance and executed justice upon him.

The Hand did God's work. Thank God for it!

The Hand of Spring County grasps the Hand
of Jo Daviess County! Bully for you! So say
we all of us! COMMITTEE.

No wonder that the coroner's jury sitting on
Burr Hobbs's corpse found for its verdict:—

“Died by the visitation of God.”

The morning broke balmy and serene, with scarce a breath of air to set the foliage in motion. A great concourse of people was gathered at the Springville station when the train slowly pulled in. It was not a surging crowd, but an orderly, regulated concourse of sympathizing friends and neighbors. The citizens' committee was in charge of everything, and the bearers with their mourning badges stood in a silent rank. Flags hung at half-mast. The engine-bells were tolling in the neighborhood of the halting-place; and all over the little city the church-bells and the town fire-bell were sounding in half-minute strokes. All business was suspended. The station house was draped with black and white, as were the town-hall, Polander Brothers' store, and the printing-office; and also the house of the fire-engine company whereof Phil had been a member. Even the cottage was cared for; an arch of evergreens being erected over the gate.

The funeral services were to be held in the church; so the bearers carried the coffin thither, the city band playing a dead march, and the engine company, in uniform, acting as a guard of honor. The long procession formed behind the

mourners' carriages and marched to the sound of muffled drums and tolling bells. Brother Kizer's gentle soul was always shown at its best in funeral addresses, and on this occasion every word he uttered was excellent, timely, touching. Meg's friends in the choir sang, with heartfelt solemnity: —

“Unveil thy bosom, faithful tomb!
Take this new treasure to thy trust:
And give these sacred relics room
To slumber in their native dust.”

Then when the coffin was opened, and the long procession began to file past it, women were dissolved in tears, and strong men were shaken with emotion at the sight of the beautiful features, so calm in death, showing such cruel wounds suffered in heroic self-sacrifice.

Was all this only added anguish to the bereaved?

No! It was hard to bear, but had not the poignancy of unshared and unsharable sorrow. Public sympathy seems to change the nature of private grief and turn it to melancholy. Pride enters the soul and shares the room with regret. The mother and sister felt their hearts swell with an exaltation that was almost exultation at the universal recognition of the glory of Phil's death.

So when waters, seething tumultuously in a narrow channel, come to a broad space of common level, lo! the raging torrent is changed to a quiet lake. The water is the same; but now it can receive the light of day, and reflect the smile of heaven.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TO HAVE HER OWN WAY NO MORE.

THE healthy mind cures its wounds with a celerity corresponding to that shown by the healthy body in triumphing over the ills that flesh is heir to.

After our friends in the cottage had fallen back into the old routine of care and labor, and followed it a reasonable time, life resumed much of its wonted aspect to them. They would not like to have the world told, even here and now, just *how* soon laughter, cheerful laughter, once more sounded within its walls; or how soon a part of each night's returning pain consisted in self-blame that sorrow had not been their constant and only feeling during the past day and evening.

Nor could they speak, even to each other, of a certain matter which each felt for himself; namely, the strain and almost shame it caused them, after time had begun to heal their wound, to meet friends whose sad faces, subdued tones, sighs, and sympathetic words showed that they had gone back to the anguish of those direful days. These others had been outside the unspeakable agony *they* had lived through and therefore lived down. Their visits came like a

renewal of the tolling bells and muffled drums. They wanted the first course of the feast of sorrow brought back to the table of those who had eaten and drunk of the whole of it to repletion.

Mrs. McVey herself returned to her work and to a degree of equanimity she would have thought impossible while away from it. She was certainly not more low spirited than in the dark time after Phil first left them, and after her homecoming from the long sleigh-ride. It is not too much to say that these former depressed and depressing thoughts and fancies were now worth all they ever cost.

Zury had now become, easily and naturally, a constant and welcome guest at the cottage. His strong, well-balanced nature was a stay and safeguard for them all. One day he said:—

“Margaret; if you don’t know how to invest the money Phil left you, I’ll tell you what I’ll do; I’ll let you have half the red hill at just what it cost me — ninety-five hundred — and I’ve lost interest and taxes on it a year.”

“We-ell, Uncle Zury. I think I’ll do it. I’ll talk with mother about it. You advise it, do you?”

“Oh, I don’t like to interfere much with my advice. If I had n’t thought it worth nineteen thousand I would n’t have given that for it; and my opinions have n’t changed that I know of.”

“Money coming in by a few dollars at a time, as those notes will be paid off, will be difficult to invest—for an ignorant girl like me. It looks like my best chance.”

After corresponding with Mr. Fenton and Mr. Masten about the matter, Margaret accepted the offer and they met to settle.

"Now I propose to take ninety-five hundred dollars in the notes that's past due, and just a-comin' due; and give you the longest runnin' ones to hold; they'll be earning interest for you as they run."

So said, so done. The notes were carefully assorted in the order of their due dates, and formally handed over to Zury in exchange for a deed of a half interest in the red hill. Then Meg had remaining all the ready money and a respectable pile of "bills receivable" in the future — indorsed by the well-known signature,

U. PROUDER,

which made them "good as wheat."

By this sharp dodge, the "meanest man" took off her hands, at par, all the "trash," which of course formed part of the past-due paper. His financial ingenuity was great as of old — only the stream flowed in the opposite direction. He started to tell Meg how to make a list of these notes, and what to do regarding each as fast as it approached maturity; but she soon let him know that she could keep a "bills receivable" account quite as well as he could, and do all that was needful for turning the obligations into cash. She was not her mother's daughter for nothing.

"She's business! A whole team and a hoss to spare! Wonder where she got it from!"

This sale by Proudor to Margaret McVey of

half the red hill, for some consideration not stated in the deed, was of course recorded and observed in Galena, and its echoes sounded even in Springville. Meg found herself in the novel position of a capitalist — spoken to and of in that character. Not long after the transfer Mr. Masten wrote to her that he had been requested to get her to name a price at which she would sell her half-interest; but after a short cogitation she answered that she should not sell separate from her partner, Mr Prouder, and all this she told to Zury (as well as to the others), vastly to his delight.

“Now, Uncle Zury — and mother — and Dr. Strafford — since we conspirators are all together and nobody else in hearing, I want some further planning and plotting. What shall I do with the ready money that lies like a bunch of rags in my bureau, and like a burden on my conscience?”

“Put it in the bank,” said Strafford.

“That would take it out of my drawer, but not off my mind.”

“Give it back to Mr. Prouder, my daughter.”

Prouder gave an impatient movement of the head, as if he was a little annoyed with Anne — for once in his life. Then he said: —

“I can lend it out for you, if you wish.”

“Oh, Meg; do give it to him, to do whatever he chooses with it!”

“But, Mamma — we’ve been all over that once. Now if none of you have anything more

to say, I have an idea of my own. Doctor ; how much would it cost to buy out the ' Bugle ' ? ”

“ Entire ? ”

“ Yes ; first page, second page, third page, fourth page, types, press, subscription list, advertising list, bad debts, good-will, and fixtures.”

“ Hook and line, bob and sinker, as the boys say,” suggested Zury.

“ Well, Margaret ; it would cost a good deal more than it would have done before you began to write for it.”

“ Or you, Doctor.”

“ Might tell 'em you are going to withdraw, Meg, and then ask 'em their price.”

“ Yes, we might, Uncle Zury — if it were true, which it is n't.”

Zury squeezed his chin and was sorry he had spoken.

“ But, Margaret, there is a great deal of the work that neither you nor I would care to do.”

“ Of course, Doctor ; but we might hire the present man, Finkbine, on a salary, as publisher. I long for the control of the editorial matter.”

“ So so, Miss ! You begin to thirst for power, do you ? ”

“ My mouth is parched for it ! ”

“ Having tasted blood ” —

“ I hanker after more ? Yes, Doctor, gore is the only beverage suited to my present state of mind.”

“ The Springville ' Bugle ' is to make Rome howl hereafter, is it ? ”

"Certainly, if Rome desires to be made to howl, she shall howl vociferously. But seriously; I feel every week as if the third page were crying out against being folded face to face with the second. You know the Bible says: 'Thou shalt not yoke the ass and the ox together,' don't you?"

When they had laughed at this sally, Meg added:—

"Oh, I know that you are saying to yourselves 'which is which,' and that I have no right to call Mr. Finkbine an ox; but those are old jokes and this is *business*."

"Well, Margaret; I will gently sound Mr. Finkbine to-morrow, and we will all meet again to-morrow night and conspire further."

"Yes, do! I love to conspire!"

When Zury departed Anne took his arm and went with him to the gate, as was her habit in these days.

"You don't try very hard to please me, now do you, Mr. Prouder?"

"Show me how I don't."

"Well—you would n't take that money—even that little of all your gift!"

"Why, Anne, be reasonable! You ask me to take *Meg's* property away to please *you*!"

She gave his arm an impatient shake and said:

"Oh pshaw! You know how that is! With you everything is always money, money, money!"

He put his hand on hers and answered with a little laugh:—

"Mine 'll all be yours, some day, I hope. Now *you* don't begrudge *her* that little out of the lot, do you?"

She drew her hand away quickly.

"Want it for myself? Now you are dreadful! It is just because I don't want it for myself that I don't want it for Meg. Don't you understand? I should feel as if I were being paid for — something."

"Well; Phil had a right to pay you for being his mother. And he did his best, poor boy."

"My son owed me nothing. All I ever did for him — all I ever suffered for him, in body or mind — unspeakable as it was — he paid a thousand times over by just *being* my son."

"He had a right to pay you, and he did his best."

"If he had the right, *you* have not."

"What I gave him was between me and him. Thank God I could do it and did it! What he gave you was between you and him. Meg had the proper idea of it."

"Meg does not know all."

"She knows enough to pass a righteous judgment." Then after a moment's silence he added: "Why are you so hard against me, Anne?"

"Because you won't let me have my way. I am not for sale! What did I do when you sent me that Gas Company stock?"

"You sent it back."

"And then when you gave it to me again?"

"You sent it back again."

"Now you see how firmly resolved I was. I would *not* give in ; so you had to, did you not ?"

He was silent.

"Confess, now ; the great Zury had to give in, for once."

Still silence.

"I hope you have no lingering idea of having your own way at last — of indorsing it over to me again, have you ?"

"I won't have to," he answered, with a nervous laugh.

"Won't have to what ?"

"Indorse it over to you again."

"What do you mean ?"

"I guess I'd better not tell. You'd be madder than ever and never speak to me again."

"I'll never speak to you again if you *don't* tell."

"Will you be mad ?"

"Very likely, yes."

"Well, will you try not to be ?"

"No. I want to have my own way."

"And you won't even try not to be angry with poor Zury — won't try to take him as he means, in his awkward, old-fashioned, countrified ways."

"Oh, yes ; I'll try. Now tell me what you have in your mind."

"Well, you know life is uncertain."

"Alas — yes !"

"I thought to myself how I might wake up some morning and find myself dead — and you not provided for — and so I jest" —

"Just what ?"

"Jest indorsed the certificates over to you once more, and put them in the bank in a sealed envelope addressed to the cashier, not to be opened till after my death."

He waited anxiously for her to speak, but she did not.

"One dividend day has passed since then, and the gas company sent me a check for two thousand dollars, and a notification to call for my stock dividend — same amount in new stock. I just sent 'em back the check and told 'em I'd parted with my shares."

Still she kept her distressing silence.

"Well — that's what 'tis, and it can't be no tizzer, as the boys used to say. I meant well. I meant well."

After a long pause she turned to him and put her two white hands on his two broad shoulders and laid her head on his breast. Said she: —

"You meant me to have it whether I married you or not! Oh, I'm afraid I shall never, never have my own way any more!"

"I could help you have your own way all your life — or at least all mine — if you'd let me," said he, putting one arm around her shoulders and one hand on her soft hair.

"I'm afraid you would be always helping me have your way!"

"Never! I told you once that if you would be my wife, your way should be the law until I could convince you that my way was better, if it was, which was n't likely. That all you want

shall be yours without having to ask for it. That I would try never to save another cent by — my old ways. That it would be a hard lesson to teach a hand that's always been used to doing *so*" (he pretended to pick up a handful of grain) "to begin to do *so*" (and he loosened his grip), "but that I was n't too old to learn it."

After another pause Anne said: —

"Yes; I remember it all."

"It was n't long ago; yet it seems long, seeing what I've gone through! What *we* have gone through together."

She felt a tear drop on her wrist, and put her hand up to his wet cheek to comfort him.

"I have n't forgotten what I promised to learn. I've watched myself, and I am almost ready to tell you my lesson is learnt."

"When will you be quite ready?"

"Oh — try me any day! Put on your old, pretty school-ma'am ways. Sing out, 'Lowest class in good behavior stand up!' and see if I'm at the foot any more!"

"I'd love to see you at the head of the first class — and myself next to you."

"Well — when shall it be? To-morrow? If the Justice's shop was n't shut up I'd say to-night. I'm so afraid you'll change your mind — you sweetheart!"

"Nonsense! I must get lots of clothes before I can think of being married."

"Oh, why? Are n't your clothes good enough? And can't you get them better after we're married?"

"Of course not, you dear goose! I'm not so young that my clothes are of no consequence. Nor so old either, yet awhile, I thank you!"

"You are a good deal younger than I am — and if you need a whole trunk-full of new clothes, what shall *I* do, I'd like to know! Who'll tell me that?"

"Oh — ask Dr. Strafford about that. He's not a dandy, but I've no doubt he can tell you a lot of citified ways you'll be glad to learn."

"Doc Strafford? I did think one while that Strafford was cutting me clear out."

"Oh, that's all past and gone."

Here a voice from the doorway cried: —

"Did I hear my name called out there? I hope so, unless you mean to bar the way and keep me here all night."

"Who's keeping you?"

"Oh, I thought it would n't be good manners to intrude — seeing that two's company and three's a crowd."

"Nonsense, Doctor! At our age!" said Anne, as with a hand-squeeze she parted from the joyful Zury and walked to the house. "Mr. Prouder has something to tell you, my dear, dear friend. And something to ask you, he says — some advice I am not qualified to give."

"Professional?"

"Well — not exactly, as you are not a tailor."

"Oh, see here, Strafford! I can't really ever wear such tight gloves as these! I'll get corns on my fingers sure enough!"

“ Well, pick out some looser ones — any kind you like, only get plenty of them and *always be sure to wear them!* ”

“ All right. Anything to keep peace out of the family, as the boy said.”

“ Oh, see here, Strafford! *Is* this coat big enough? ”

“ Well, *I* think it is. What do you think? ”

“ Oh, I don't know. Looks to me — kind o' half grown. A leetle as though it had been — *picked too soon.* ”

CHAPTER XL.

DESOLATION AND CONSOLATION.

WHILE Anne and Zury were at the gate the young people in the house had had a good deal more talk, and got much farther along in the plan for complete management of the "Bugle." Meg talked gayly and fast, always taking up the thread as soon as Strafford stopped speaking; but she could not conceal from him that she was talking against time, and longing for that conference outside to come to an end.

"Poor girl!" he thought. "Her own mother — her only living relative — planning to leave her! To make a new household, wherein she can only be an outsider; new interests from which she is inevitably left out, in spite of anything which any of the three can do!"

Then when the time came that the subject was really exhausted, and his longer stay could only be markedly caused by the forgetful ones outside, he said: —

"Now, Margaret; you can't deceive me — your thoughts are of your mother and Mr. Prouder!"

Instantly her acting was at an end, and she buried her face in her handkerchief.

"Now, my dear girl; why can't you see that

your remedy is in your own hands? — it is simply for you and me to marry, as I proposed the other night."

She only shook her head with a decided, almost angry negative. Then she arose, went to her own room with a muffled good-night, and he departed, just in time to hear his own name pronounced outside as has been told already.

Anne slowly entered the house full of the sweet dream of being unselfishly beloved by a strong man — that dream so blissful for any woman, young or old, or midway between youth and age!

The sitting-room all lighted and empty recalled her to herself, and brought a flood of tender sympathy for her dear girl. She felt her way into Meg's dark room and to the bed whereon her daughter lay all dressed and wide awake.

"Oh, my darling! What can I say to you?"

"Why, blessed Mother, you need n't say anything! Just let me cry a little once in a while, in peace and comfort. I would n't have things different if I could between you and — Uncle Zury."

"Would n't you really, my sweet one?"

"No, indeed! What kind of a monster of selfishness do you take me for?"

"Oh, Margaret, you don't know all my reasons for marrying him."

"I don't need to know any more than I do now. At first, in the old times, my heart rebelled against it; but since I've seen him through the days of our bereavement — I can only rejoice for you both."

"But not for yourself, dear!"

"Oh, I shall do very well. I'll edit a paper — perhaps write a book! Who knows?"

"Meg! You remember those shares of stock? Well, they have been stored in the bank, ever since I sent them back to Zury; to be mine whether I should ever marry him or not! And there is a two-thousand-dollar dividend waiting for me at the gas office!"

"Oh, he is splendid! I knew he was."

"Daughter; I'd give my right hand to see you and Dr. Strafford married."

"Mother, will you keep a secret if I tell it to you?"

"Surely, darling. Nothing you could ask could I refuse."

"Well, then; Dr. Strafford asked me once before to marry him, and I refused; and to-night he asked me again, and I gave him the same answer."

"What? Oh, Margaret! Just think what he is! How able, how good, how affectionate — above all, what a gentleman!"

"Yes — he is all that. But, Mamma" —

"But what, my dear?"

"Well, it's a case of mother-in-law, — a new kind of case of mother-in-law."

"What! I to be feared as a trial to *my* daughter's husband!" and she looked pained and offended.

"No, indeed!" laughed Meg. "But you should have been his wife, not his mother-in-law."

"Now, Margaret! Can it be that you lay it up against him that he — wanted to marry your mother years before he proposed to you? Before you were old enough to marry, in fact!"

"No, Mamma; on the contrary, I think it very much to his credit that he loved you devotedly for all those years. And I knew it all the time!"

"Well, then?"

"Well — I think — that he'll never be in love with any other woman as long as he lives!"

"Oh, pshaw! Stuff and nonsense! Now, don't wait for foolish, romantic, novelistic love! There is no such thing in the world! Boys and girls think there is, and marry, and wake up out of a rosy dream to a thorny reality."

"But, Mamma" —

"No, no, my child! Don't set yourself against your mother. Just such feelings of respect, admiration, affection, as you have for Dr. Strafford make the happiest marriages; marriages that keep up a steady flame long after the passion of romance might have flared up and gone out in dreadful blackness."

"Now, Mother dear, you are uttering sentence after sentence that would do for a book! I'm going to remember them to put into my novel! All the same, I'm going to stay single all my life!"

"Oh, my darling — my comfort — my son and daughter both — how strong and good you are! If I could lose sight of *your* future happiness" —

"I shall be happy! Never fear!"

"If that is the literal truth, then my own happiness is complete! The one bitterness in my past is the cruel loss of my son, and the one cloud over my future has been the thought of separation from my daughter. Now, if we are not to be separated — Oh, what have I done to deserve so much happiness — when but a few short months ago I thought I should never smile again!"

"Well, Mother; take all the comfort you can out of the thought that you will have your old-maid daughter always with you." ("But at the same time I privately think I shall never live for long in the house of any step-father.")

In the new countries prices are named, bargains struck, and property transferred with startling rapidity. At the next evening meeting Strafford was ready to report the sum asked for the "Bugle" outfit. It was unexpectedly low, and far within Meg's means; and Zury easily restrained himself from propounding a plan by which it might undoubtedly have been bought still lower; by the purchase of outstanding debts and "putting on the screws." The investment was practically resolved upon then and there.

Upon this followed much planning as to details of management. Anne must leave the Polanders as soon as they could let her go, and write for dear life on the voracious third page, leaving the voracious second page to Strafford; with Meg as editor-in-chief, writing when, where, and what she pleased. (Strafford had already given up his railroad office, so his time was free.)

The name, poor as it was, must remain unchanged, for it was getting a vogue all over the West; and even in the enlightened East the tri-weekly was known by its "Bugle-blasts." These were largely contributed by Hall, dear little Phil's "smart jour" of the early days; for he had not only outlived a score of his betters, but had reformed, had married, and was now an oracle on frontier dialect and frontier caricatures in prose and in rhyme; drolleries which a native would never think worth telling, a stranger would never know of to tell, and only a comer from other localities, with good powers of observation, could see, could recognize as worth noting, could note, and could relate.

Hall had never been able to shake off the nickname of "Alky," so he did the next best thing: he adopted the *nom de plume* "Alchemist," and thus accounted respectably for the other.

"Well! Fellow-conspirators; so far, so good! Now let us conspire some more. What is to be the name of this new grand combination?"

"That is a difficult problem. How will this do? 'Prouder, McVey, and Strafford. Don't judge us by our looks, but give us a trial.'"

All laughed at this, and said Zury:—

"That's what the boys call a 'singed cat; better than she looks.' But on the contrary I should think that everybody in the concern except me, would just like to be judged by their looks!"

"Oh, thank you, Uncle Zury! You think you are the only one of us with a soul finer than his

body! The rest are better outside than in, are they?"

Of course Zury had no retort for this quip, and (also of course) Anne rushed to his rescue.

"Now, Meg! I'm sorry I have n't brought you up better. I did the best I could; but I remember the switches I gathered from the lilac-bush were so tender they broke in bits just before they touched you! All your uncle Zury meant was that our souls were perfect and our bodies were in keeping with them! Was n't that it, Zury?"

"Why, yes, Anne — if you say so, that was it. You always say what I mean, and I always mean what you say."

"There, Margaret! Now are n't you ashamed of your naughtiness?"

"Oh, yes, Mamma, I suppose so. I usually am. I can't make out where I got all my wickedness from."

"From me, my love; from me."

"Perhaps; and in taking it from you, I took all yours away. Don't you remember what the clown in the circus said? You and your two children were sitting in the front row, our feet in the sawdust, and he suddenly stopped his other nonsense and looked straight at us a minute; and then cried so everybody could hear him, 'I guess, Mom, good looks is *red-headitary* in your family!' Don't you remember how all the people laughed?"

Yes, Anne remembered — and each of the

coterie saw arise before his memory Phil's face ; as a boy, as a man, and then as a death-mask in the coffin ; marred, yet beautiful, with red curls clustering about forehead and lips. And each knew by sympathetic instinct that all the others were contemplating the same cherished picture.

A few minutes of tender silence followed. These intervals of quiet were of common occurrence in the little circle. They scarcely broke the current of its content — they were more like links in a chain of love ; or a strand in a cable ; not always visible, but always adding to its strength.

Meg broke the silence.

“How would this do for a running motto ?

‘Blow, Bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying.’”

“Yes,” said Strafford, “that would be excellent — until the time when all the world shall have read the Princess ; then somebody will suggest that the other line be added :

‘And answer, echoes answer, dying, dying, dying.’”

“Oh, well ; that does n't hurt us. It's the echoes that are dying, dying, dying ; — not the Bugle.”

At a suggestion from Meg, Anne and Strafford sang the sweet refrain — treble and tenor. The low notes of the closing words allowed to be heard a knock at the front door. Meg arose, and ushered in Mr. and Mrs. Kizer. Their faces, (the lady's especially) were the pictures of despairing woe. As soon as they had solemnly

greeted each person there and taken their seats as if at a funeral, in presence of the dead, the worthy minister said, as a professional effort toward consolation : —

“ The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Zury breathed an audible “ amen,” and a long silence followed.

“ I s’pose,” moaned Mrs. Kizer (who was quite uneducated — had been married for her beauty; now, alas, a thing of the remote past, buried in time and adipose tissue), “ I s’pose that hymn you was a-singin’ was a favoryte of *his*.”

“ I think it is a strain my son would have enjoyed.” And poor Anne cried softly at the reopening of her wound.

After another lugubrious interval Mrs. Kizer moaned again : —

“ Ye don’t know, I don’t s’pose, whether he experienced any change of heart after he left.”

Anne shook her bowed head.

“ Then I don’t wonder ye feel *awful* bad ! ”

Again for a long space one might hear no sound except the melancholy rustle of Mrs. Kizer’s black silk, moved by her laborious breathing.

“ But the mercy of the Lord is everlasting,” said Brother Kizer : “ his loving-kindness endureth forever.”

To which, after a time, his experienced helpmeet added : —

“ While the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return.”

"Amen and amen!" responded the minister, with a determined rising inflection — as if resolutely, heroically, hoping against hope.

Another obstinate pause.

"Whilst it dooz hold out!" said Sister Kizer. "But after it is wunst blowed out" — She closed with a tremendous, voluminous, sumptuous sigh.

The blood rushed to Margaret's face and temples in an angry flood. Dr. Strafford's brows fell until his eyes were hidden, except for a fierce gleam that shone through their shadows. But only Zury was equal to the occasion. Rising to his feet and clasping his hands he said in ringing tones: —

"Friends! Brother Kizer, — and Sister Kizer — ye mean well, but ye're a-makin' a mistake." (This was a favorite phrase of Zury's.) "I was by that boy's death-bed — if ye call it a bed! I saw his dyin' looks and heard his dyin' words! He died in a way that you, or I, or any man might be proud to die! He died fer his kind, as straight and brave as any Christian martyr of 'em all! God bless him! No one need tell *me* that the Crucified One met him any way but with outstretched hands — an' a shinin' smile — an' lovin' words — 'Brother! Come right along into my arms! Bring yer burns 'n' yer blisters, 'n' yer scars — bring 'em all right hy'er! I want to touch 'em 'n' heal 'em, every one!'"

His voice seemed to fill all the house even after he ceased speaking. He did not sit down; he did not try to conceal or disguise the rolling tears

that flowed from his eyes and that he shook off on the floor. When he could command his utterance he went on : —

“Now, friends, ef you’ve done what you thought your Christian duty, an’ are a-goin’ my way, I’ll walk along with you.”

“Brother Proudner ; you do only simple justice to my — to our good will, good feelings, and good intentions. And if you have gathered that we do less than justice to Philip’s glorious death, or cast any uncalled-for doubt of his future state, why — our words have belied our thoughts.”

No one replied. Zury did not sit down. What could the worthy couple do but rise to go? Brother Kizer approached the unseeing Anne and said : —

“I don’t like to leave you, Sister McVey, without further explanation of my views and good intentions.”

“Some other time, Mr. Kizer, if you please.”

Proudner managed to linger far enough behind the others to hear Anne say : —

“Dear Zury ! Come back, please ! Won’t you, dear ?” And he nodded.

As he walked along with his deeply-moved companions, he easily listened in silence to the minister’s unstinted and professionally-framed phrases of explanation and justification of their late sayings and doings. Then Mrs. Kizer interposed her sharp tongue.

“The’ dew say, Brother Praouder, th’t you’re a-goin’ t’ th’ widder’s pootty constant.”

"Yes. I'm thar a good deal — I thank God!"

"Which is it to be; mother er darter?"

"Mrs. McVey and I propose to marry, if it please heaven."

"Wal, wal! After all these years."

"Ya-as — took her a good while t' make up her mind to it. But the death of her son that I was so fond of — knowed all his life — seemed t' kind o' fetch us t'gether."

"Dear, dear! Dew tell, 'n' I wanter know! And when is it to be?"

"Oh, — 'course it's hard tellin'. Ye'll be likely t' hear on it. Fact is, I did think o' callin' on Brother Kizer t' marry us. But he seems to 'a' drawed a line 'twixt him 'n' us to-night, that — I dunno."

The crafty Zury knew that this would drive the less crafty but more grasping Mrs. Kizer wild with anxiety to placate him and Anne.

"Wal *now*, Mr. Praouder! I dunno 's I wuz ever *more* mistook in my *born* days. What I meant was jest the very contrairy of th' way yew took it! Says I" —

And so forth. Zury listened to a steadily flowing stream of meandering expediency and ingenuity until they reached the parsonage. Then he interrupted it with: —

"Wal, good-night, Sister Kizer; and good-night, Brother Kizer. I'll keep my eyes and ears open 'twixt naow 'n' th' weddin'-day. It's all owin' t' haow th' drop falls. If fr'm all I see 'n' hear the' ain't no just cause ner impediment

ag'in my callin' on Brother Kizer, why so be it — 'n' if the contrary, why then otherwise."

Angels in heaven and saints on earth could not have more honeyed words cast before them, than were offered upon the altars of the unconscious dwellers in the cottage by Mrs. Kizer in the weeks next ensuing. And (to anticipate a little) when the great day came, Brother Kizer received a wedding-fee exactly ten times as large as the largest he had ever grasped before in his life.

"Dr. Strafford," said Anne, as soon as Zury and the Kizers were fairly out of hearing, "tell me frankly — as if I were your elder sister — are we behaving like heartless, unloving, forgetting mother and sister of a dead son and brother?"

Controlling his deep feeling as well as he could, Strafford answered: —

"Before heaven, and before my conscience, and as if in the very presence of my beloved boy-hero, Phil, I say no! A thousand times no! You are behaving naturally — these fools are behaving artificially. The beloved image of our lost darling is constantly before our eyes, and his name often on our tongues. People of their kind would make a fetish of him — hide it away, out of sight and hearing and thought as long as possible, and then bring it out and howl around it! The pious heathen!"

Anne sat with her attention fixed upon the expected arrival of Zury, and started to meet him the moment she heard the gate move on its hinges.

"Oh, Zury! Can it be true that we are unfaithful to Phil's memory, when we can think of other things, and talk and laugh and plan as we do?"

"Why, sweetheart, what 'd Phil say? Jest lay yer pootty head daown thar, 'n' shet yer pootty eyes, 'n' listen, 'n' see what your boy sez t' ye."

"He says: 'Mother! Mother! Don't forget me!'" And she sobbed aloud.

"Ya-as — I kin hear him tew! God bless his dear voice! Naow ye're nearer tew him ner what I be; talk back tew him 'n' ask him 'shall we think of ye a-cryin' er a-smilin'?' 'n' tell me what he answers ye."

"He says. 'Smiling, Mother! Always smiling! Tell Uncle Zury to be more glad I lived than sorry I died.'"

"Thar! Thar! I knowed it! I knowed it!"

She looked up and saw the strong, hard face lifted toward the sky; the well-known lines and wrinkles transfigured in the moonlight. He bent over and kissed her eyelids and her lips, and said:—

"Sweetheart: in the natural course of things, the day 'll come when ye 'll be rememberin' me as yer lovin' ole husband dead 'n' gone; 'n' ef I kin, I 'll be a-watchin' yer face; 'n' when I see a smile, I 'll say, 'Zury! she 's thinkin' of some way ye pleased her!' 'N' if ye look sad I 'll say, 'Zury! That was one of the times when ye made a mistake—the many times when ye missed what ye wuz aimin' at.'"

CHAPTER XLI.

GOOD-BY, ALL !

STRAFFORD (beside his editorial tasks) had now to work himself into the management of the great Proudler estate, for its author had other fish to fry.

Early spring saw a quiet, happy wedding and a long, long wedding-tour. First (of course) Chicago ; and next a ride on the Pioneer, resplendent in her new pilot, smoke-stack, and cab, but (as her engineer, Sam Sanders, proudly pointed out) her old foot-board, worn thin by Phil's honored tread. Then a day at the scene of the accursed wreck, where Anne was greeted by a score of eager sympathizers. (Among other hands that clasped hers were some of those which had avenged her.)

A few days at Galena and the Red Hill were taken up in a season of renewed mourning, for Annie, lovely in her melancholy, had remained resolutely faithful to Phil's memory, greatly to poor Perry Fenton's disappointment. Now for the real bridal-trip, beginning with a ten days' voyage down the Mississippi to meet the spring. Ice and snow at the North are exchanged for roses and balmy breezes at New Orleans. Anne

(being a wise woman) resolutely throws her adoring bridegroom on his own resources for some hours of every day while she writes faithfully to the "Bugle;" and by judicious dividing up, her letters are made to furnish at least a few bright paragraphs for every number of the famous "third page."

The only breaks which are permitted in these hours of isolation are the times when Zury cannot help begging her to come out "just for one minute" to observe the marvels that meet him at every turn. The strange river-life of blacks and whites; the wild songs of the "roustabouts" on the forward deck; when the *Magnolia*, having made a landing, drops down along the whole length of the line of wharf-boats and then surges up past them at roaring speed, the strange, weird melody from a hundred black throats floating, softened by distance, over to the high paved "levee" and delighting the crowds gathered to see the racer go by, and then, swerving outward, turn her head down-stream again.

Slavery, in all its enervating beauty and all its half-seen ugliness, is a source of immeasurable interest to the sturdy freeman. Those strange outlandish negroes, so childishly happy when they ought to be so angrily wretched! Those hundreds of thousands of cotton-bales — those thousands of sugar-hogsheads — those multitudinous evidences of boundless riches too easily obtained by the ruling class — those wild orgies of gambling and drinking where these riches are squan-

dered — the ten days seem all too short to exhaust his interest or satisfy his boyish thirst for knowledge.

The idle, sunny beauty of New Orleans, with its swarming blacks and its lordly planters ; its languid, liquid creole speech ; its vine-covered houses ; its dazzling “shell-road ;” its towering ships, coming from all over the globe to carry off the products of the garden of the whole earth —

“Oh, Anne, Anne! How big the world is, and how little I have been, and should have been forever if it had not been for you!”

Back again, up the Mississippi to Cairo, and up the Ohio to Cincinnati and Pittsburgh. Then over the mountains to a little place whence old Ephraim, and Selina, and little Shoog, and boy Zury started so many, many years ago!

Then down to Washington, to see the magnates of the land and shake the hand of the head of the nation — the great land whereof Zury is just taking in a slight conception, but whereof no mortal soul can grasp the immensity.

One week's letters are dated from Washington and Mount Vernon. Another week's from Philadelphia. Another from New York. Another from Boston and Lowell ; where they visit a certain cotton-mill (almost superannuated) wherein Anne doffs her outside wraps, steps behind a certain frame full of whirring spindles, and (by consent of her successor at the task) catches up the breaking threads, and reunites them, moving with almost her own old springing, dancing step,

whistling an old air in time to the rhythm of the machinery, and losing sight of the lapse of years—but only for a few moments. After that she has to confess, flushed and panting, that her strength is less, her weight greater, and her breath shorter than when she left the well-remembered spot, nearly thirty years before. So she kisses the blushing girl who has been watching her with admiring eyes, and takes off her own pretty neckerchief and pin, and places it round the young thing's throat—scarce fairer or smoother than her own—and bids her good-morning, while a hundred curious glances follow her and Zury from the spot.

A visit to her mother's neglected grave, and the selecting and ordering of a becoming monument for the spot, fill the rest of the day; and finish all that need be recounted of this wedding-tour—as happy a one as any ever made by any couple, old or young, since the Garden of Eden.

Meanwhile, wonderful things have been going on at the Prouder farm. Under the orders of Meg and Strafford, a transformation has been effected there that has been the wonder and the talk of all Spring County and a good part of the rest of the State of Illinois. Friends and the younger and more progressive part of the public named the rejuvenated house “Portico Palace;” the envious and skeptical conservatives call it “Zury's Folly.”

Whichever came nearest to doing it justice, one thing is certain: it yielded a sweet and grateful

and graceful welcome to our tired, happy travelers when they reached it. And one other thing is equally certain ; namely, that it will not be described here ; having already furnished a chapter to the literature of the world ; the closing one in the chronicles of "Zury ; the meanest man in Spring County."

"Oh, yes, you dear children. We have been just as happy as the days were long — and they were never long enough, were they, Zury ?"

"No," answered Zury. "Though, come to think, they've been growing longer all the time, to try to suit us."

"Well — how's the 'Bugle' ?"

"Splendid ! Subscription list doubled — advertising crowding on the reading-matter — all on account of your lovely letters ! I suppose you have hardly received any of the numbers we sent flying all over the Union to meet you or to follow you."

"Oh, yes ; we got some in Galena, some in New Orleans, some in Cincinnati, one in Pittsburgh, none in Washington, two in Philadelphia, three in New York, and four in Boston ! So you see I've kept an accurate account !"

"Yes ; we the editors are much flattered."

"Well, to tell you the truth, your Uncle Zury was more eager to see the letters from places than to see the places themselves."

"Of course I was ! My wife's letter from a place told more about it than all my eyes had been able to see in it !"

"Well; you have a fine lot of literature laid up for future reading. See—the largest if not the greatest book in your library is a complete bound volume of the 'Bugle' with A. P.'s letters!"

"Why — Great Scott! So it is!"

Zury's face was instantly bent over the precious volume, hunting for special letters from certain places which he had been hungry to read about ever since he visited them. After a while Anne called to him: —

"Come, Zury! You'll have plenty of time for that after our children are gone back to Springville."

"Yes, yes — only just let me look for one thing" —

After a while Anne spoke again: —

"Zury, my dear; it is n't the very best of manners to read to yourself in company."

"Oh — is n't it?" said he; and closed the book with a haste that seemed to say, "That settles it! I've learned to heed those words."

"Now, here's the next most entrancing volume we have provided for you. Plans for the Springville house."

"Why, you dears! So it is! Cellar — basement, first floor — second floor — attic — front elevation — side elevation — rear elevation — oh, I never saw anything so lovely in my life! Who did all this?"

Strafford put his hand on his heart and bowed low in affected reverence: —

"Your Majesty: I had the honor."

"You, Doctor? With your own hands?"

"With these unworthy hands, in their intervals of rest from scribbling, scissoring, and pasting."

"Well, Doc," said Zury, "you *are* a universal genius!" and he studied the plans in detail with wonder and delight.

"Second floor; now let's see: this is the front — what are these two big rooms?"

"Well; the southeast is meant for Mrs. Prouder's bedroom and the southwest for yours."

"What!"

"Southeast for her, with the morning sun and southwest for you with the afternoon. Unless you want it the other way. You see I gave up the whole south front to those two rooms, opening into each other — only stole off enough for a bath-room opening into both and a couple of closets."

Anne went all through the plans with their projector, intensely interested; criticising here, praising there, suggesting here, submitting to reason there, and so on; and next morning at breakfast Zury took pains to say: —

"Doc; I approve your plan in every particular, and I am only impatient to see the house started! When can you get to work at it? I suppose you will go ahead — supervise the building on the usual terms?"

"Oh, yes — five per cent. — if my partner will spare so much of my attention diverted from the firm's work."

"Certainly I will," said Meg. "Of course the earnings go into the firm's income."

All laughed at Meg's sharpness; but she meant what she said, and was not surprised to find that the doctor had never thought of doing otherwise.

Strafford had to give an account of his stewardship of Zury's affairs, and they had a long talk in their early ride over the farm next morning; and they became very confidential. At last Zury blurted out what was in his mind.

"Dr. Strafford!" (the doctor knew that something unusual must be coming to follow this unusual formality). "Why don't you and Meg make up your minds to do as her mother and I have done?"

"Well, Uncle Zury, you must ask Margaret about that. I have proposed it more than once, or twice, either; three times — I *think* it's three times; but — I suppose she can't fancy me; she always says 'no.' I've concluded I'm too old for her."

"Too old! Why, Great Gallinippers! You're nothing but a boy!"

"Well, old or young, I'm just the wrong age, anyhow. I was too young for the mother, now it appears I'm too old for the daughter!" and he laughed gayly, showing that neither circumstance weighed seriously on his mind.

Strafford hurried back to Springville that afternoon to attend to the exacting and engrossing "Bugle;" and thither the others followed a few days later. Their first visit was to Phil's grave;

now covered with the committee's monument. Its design had been let out on competition; Strafford had unthinkingly sent in a drawing for it, so he could not be consulted in the selection; and thus it chanced that his simple and tasteful sketch was passed over and a dreadfully florid and inartistic one accepted and carried out. Yet what did it matter? They all saw through the low art to the high nature that impelled the public tribute; so in warm though carefully selected phrases the mother and sister thanked the committee, and the public for which it had acted as well as it knew how.

Then the new house was put in hand. There were other brick dwellings in the little city, but this was to be by far the finest. As soon as it was far enough advanced to show, it was visited by the curious.

"Wal, boss; you're the supervising artchitect, I believe."

"Yes; I'm trying to keep things straight."

"Wal — ye've done it, I should judge, right up to the handle. This h'yer cellar with a brick floor's better 'n th' hull house 't many a poor man lives intew. A goodle better — yes, I may say a gradle better."

"Yes. Zury's lived in a worse one himself for many a day, he tells me."

"I reckon! Naow what's all these?"

"Parlors, dining-room, library, hall."

"Wal, wal! Ef he'd 'a' be'n contented to 'a' eat in th' parlor 'n' 'a' kep' his office in his libr'y,

'n' took his hall fer all three, why then he 'd 'a' saved a lot o' money, naow would n't he ? ”

“ He would so ! His pocket would be just loaded with the money he's paying to these brick-layers and carpenters and plasterers and so forth — and they could have been raising corn.”

“ Wal — corn ain't scuss, as I know of. But then he need n't 'a' kep' his money ; he could 'a' give it away instead o' spendin' on it like this.”

“ Oh, I see ! Given it to folks who had n't worked for it instead of to folks who had.”

“ Oh, wal, — I ain't a-findin' no fault with folk fer a-spendin' their own. Naow these stairs the' take a kind of a circumbendibus, don't the' ? 'N' h'yer 's a hall — 'n' a skylight over it cl'ar up t' th' roof ! Kin tell what th' weather is 'thaout a-goin' aou'doors ! 'N' what 's all these h'yer rewms a-openin' aout o' th' hall ? What 's them tew front rooms, f'rinstance ? ”

“ Oh, that 's Mr. Prouder's room, and that 's his wife's alongside.”

“ What ? Say that ag'in, stränger, ef *yew* please.”

Strafford repeated it.

“ *This* his'n 'a' *that* hern ? ” Wal, wal ! what be we a-comin' tew ? ” And the visitor took a speedy departure.

So good-by, all !

Zury and Anne are as happy as it is permitted to mortals to be.

Strafford is influential, strong, calm, at peace

with all the world (except editorially speaking, where he is always in healthy and wholesome strife), and utterly contented with his lot.

Perry Fenton tried hard to make Annie Masten change her mind — then he went to the war with the rest — and then — well it may take another book to tell what then.

As to my beloved Margaret — my favorite among womankind — she is the great Editor of the great Springville “Bugle.” Committees “wait upon” her to advance the interests of measures and of candidates. The shabby little two-story wooden house where it struggled for life in chapter first has become a solid brick office-building; “The Bugle Block,” the choicer portion devoted to the “Bugle” and the rest to tenants, who are being crowded out, one by one, as the great Daily demands more and more room for its growing needs.

Library — parlor — office; which name shall we give Meg’s sanctum? The rows upon rows of well-filled shelves; the open fireplace with its andirons and wood-box; the deep, soft carpet, the ample and useful centre-table with Phil’s dear handsome face in crayon, on an easel built into the table itself; — these scarcely suggest an office, even by help of the huge waste-basket always running over with exchanges and other “trash.” But away in one corner, with its left side close to a bright window, stands — what?

“A small cheap pine structure, whereof the back was arranged with pigeon-holes and the front let down for a writing-table.”

The very same old rattle-trap whereon Meg once looked with awe as the place where thoughts took shape and the shape took wings, and the wings flew over the open world.

If Meg is sitting at the broad, hospitable centre-table, we may approach her with confidence ; sure of meeting that bright smile, superior, yet reassuring. But if her face is toward the old pigeon-holes and her back to the public, then beware ! Even the office-cat knows that she is not to be disturbed under those circumstances.

Yes ; she has an office-cat. While it was an innocent kitten she named it Titian. When asked if its first name was n't Polly, she answered no ; it was n't that kind of a cat ; she gave him that name because of his warm, Titianesque coloring. Later, for other reasons (he grew up and unprincipled), she changed his name to Clawed.

Is she, too, contented and happy ? Well, she tries to be, and thinks she succeeds ; and is not she the best judge ?

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